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**Climate Change  
and Arctic Sustainable Development :  
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## **ABSTRACT: CIRCUMPOLAR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

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### **The effects of climate change and international politics on indigenous cultures**

The cultures and languages of the indigenous peoples of the Arctic have adapted to the arctic ecosystem. Arctic indigenous peoples live in nation states and have but limited influence on policies aimed at deterring climatic change. Indigenous peoples have always lived in accord with the principle of sustainable development. Over the last century, nation states through their actions have increasingly forced indigenous peoples to adopt more polluting forms of activity while simultaneously encroaching on the traditional forms of livelihood of indigenous cultures. Approaches to mitigate climatic change are being discussed in the Arctic Council, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the UN, the Barents Cooperation organisations, and in the domestic politics of nation states. On all of these forums indigenous peoples are only spectators, their rights limited to observation or speech, depending on the organisation. It has been recognised on an international political level that the arctic indigenous peoples will suffer the most from climate change. Nevertheless we, who will be most affected by climate change, are sidelined from the policy-making process and largely also from the administration of our own territories. Climate change, the right of indigenous nations to self-government, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples obligate nation states and international political organizations to include indigenous peoples as equal political partners in the struggle against climate change.

Article 8(j) of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity stipulates that countries shall "...subject to national legislation, respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity..." International political institutions such as the Arctic Council are shouldering an increasing share of the responsibility in the struggle against climate change. Article 8(j) should be applied also to the functioning of the Arctic Council and other multinational organisations

that deal with matters pertaining to indigenous peoples.

Indigenous languages have developed under the combined influence of cultural resources, subsistence methods, geographical location, and climate. Indigenous languages contain information on natural phenomena, an exact and scientific method of classification, a record of how the culture has reacted and adapted to changes in the resource base, and information on how the culture's methods of subsistence have evolved. Due to climatic change and the actions of nation states, this linguistic information is threatened with extinction. Indigenous languages are not taught, and the transferring of the language to the next generation is not sufficiently encouraged. The connection of the language with subsistence practices and with the environment is disappearing with the appropriation of indigenous territories for the use of the industries of the dominant culture, the dwindling of possibilities for practicing traditional subsistence methods, and the spread of the social structures of the dominant culture.

The capability of indigenous peoples to utilise their linguistic knowledge in the struggle against climate change as well as in adapting to its consequences will decrease unless indigenous peoples are allowed to retain their aboriginal culture and language. Indigenous languages offer a facility for classifying, studying, and explicating the effects of climate change. The deployment of indigenous knowledge in adapting to and studying climate change requires a strong contribution from indigenous researchers and the development of a system of academic education suited to the culture of indigenous peoples.

**Recommendations:**

1. The application of Article 8(j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity to national and international political organizations, in cooperation with indigenous peoples
2. The development of systems of academic education and researcher training suited to the requirements of indigenous cultures, and the development of climatic research carried out by indigenous peoples
3. The founding of a climate panel of arctic indigenous nations
4. Revitalisation of indigenous languages as domestic, official, and scientific media