One Story: A Report of the First Peoples Convening on Climate-Forced Displacement

Held in Girdwood, Alaska, October 1-4, 2018

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In October 2018, over sixty representatives of First and Indigenous communities met in Girdwood, Alaska, for a first-of-its-kind gathering: the First Peoples’ Convening on Climate-Forced Displacement (hereafter, First Peoples’ Convening). Representatives came from Alaska (Atmautluak, Bill Moore’s Slough, Chevak, Elim, Eyak, Golovin, Hamilton, Kotlik, Kwigillingok, Kivalina, Mary’s Igloo, Nelson Lagoon, Newtok, Nunapitchuk, Port Heiden, Shishmaref, Teller, Unalakleet), Louisiana (Atakapa-Ishak, Isle de Jean Charles, Pointe-Au-Chien), Washington (Quinault Indian Nation), Bangladesh, and the Pacific (Fiji, Kiribati, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu). The group met for three days to powerfully share the ways in which rapid climate change is impacting their communities and traditional ways of life, share traditional knowledge and practices, and begin to develop a collective vision for the future.

Participants highlighted the urgent need for action to address today’s climate crisis by centering the rights and solutions of First and Indigenous Peoples.
CURB GLOBAL WARMING NOW

The First and Indigenous Peoples who gathered in Alaska face devastating threats to their cultures, lands, human and environmental health, human rights, spirituality, well-being, traditional systems and livelihoods, food systems and food security, local infrastructure, economic viability, and their very survival. This climate crisis has been brought on by unsustainable development, continued fossil fuel extraction, and uncurbed carbon dioxide emissions. First and Indigenous Peoples, like those represented at the convening, have contributed the least to this crisis, yet bear the worst of its burdens. While the international community has made some significant strides in developing compacts and guidelines related to climate-forced displacement, it has tragically failed to do what is most needed: curb greenhouse gas emissions and stop global warming. The climate crisis is not a future or theoretical threat—urgent action is needed now.

SUPPORT FIRST AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’ SOLUTIONS

While participants in the First Peoples’ Convening came from different parts of the globe and represent dozens of First and Indigenous Peoples, many expressed the importance of the traditional knowledge held by Indigenous Elders. Relearning and embracing Indigenous knowledge and ways of life is critical for Indigenous Peoples’ resilience and cultural survival in the face of rapid climate change. But society at large, too, is in desperate need of sustainable and respectful ways of living with the earth. As the declaration drafted by the participants reads, “We are a spiritual people empowered by values and beliefs that are urgently needed today to elevate humanity to an inclusive and peaceful truth that is based on an Indigenous knowledge system of the land, sea, and sky and on observations gained from the western knowledge system.” International governing bodies, funders, and government agencies urgently need to prioritize Indigenous communities’ climate solutions and bring First and Indigenous Peoples to the table to help bring about a paradigm shift to curb today’s climate crisis.

UPHOLD THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION

Participants shared the challenges and stumbling blocks they have faced during decades of work on climate change mitigation, adaptation, and, for some, community resettlement projects needed to ensure their communities’ survival. These communities, who face layers of threats to their right to self-determination, are often not consulted, or are ignored, by government agencies considering climate adaptation measures that will impact them. The lack of enforcement of the international and domestic legal frameworks that protect their rights is paired with a dearth of funding to implement their solutions. Government actors across the globe must respect and protect Indigenous communities’ right to self-determination, particularly in relation to the perilous effects of climate change.
ONE STORY: A REPORT OF THE FIRST PEOPLES CONVENCING ON CLIMATE-FORCED DISPLACEMENT
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The convening grew out of an increasing need on the part of First and Indigenous Peoples to share their experiences with each other and organize to address the climate crisis. The participants followed in the footsteps of the 2009 Indigenous Peoples’ Global Summit on Climate Change and reiterated some of the increasingly urgent calls to action of the Anchorage Declaration, developed by that body. The First Peoples’ Convening was first conceived of when Stanley Tom, of Newtok, Alaska, and Robin Bronen, of the Alaska Institute for Justice, traveled to Papua New Guinea in 2012 to meet with Ursula Rakova, of Tulele Peisa, and hold a workshop on climate change and community-based relocation. Though thousands of miles apart, the two communities had an unmistakable fellowship and a consensus that both were being displaced by climate change and that plans were needed to relocate their communities to ensure their survival.
The First Peoples’ Convening was a space to bring communities from different regions together to share their experiences, knowledge, solutions, and challenges and build hope for the future. The participants issued a declaration following the convening, titled *The First Peoples and Indigenous Peoples’ Working Declaration*, which is printed in full at the end of this report. This report supports and acts as an accompanying document for the declaration and its call to action.

**Climate-Forced Displacement**

Today’s climate crisis is advancing rapidly, causing natural disasters that displace tens of millions of people each year and threaten millions more through slow-onset climate devastation. The majority of people who are displaced by climate events, like most of the participants at the First Peoples Convening, are displaced within their own countries (“internally displaced”). In 2017, 18.8 million people in 135 countries were newly displaced by sudden-onset disasters in their countries. From 2008 to 2016, approximately 227.6 million people were internally displaced by disasters.

Over and above these already high figures, an as-yet unknown number of people are displaced from their homes by slow-onset climate events, such as permafrost melt, sea-level rise, flooding, erosion, and drought. This is because climate forced displacement due to slow-onset events may take place over years. It may ultimately be the result of the complex ways that climate change combines with other factors to exacerbate the threats to people’s livelihoods.

The havoc wrought by the climate crisis does not impact all people equally. Residents of coastal and delta regions are disproportionately impacted by internal displacement due to severe weather events. Further, First and Indigenous Peoples experience some of the most severe impacts of the climate crisis. As Elder Patricia Cochran of Nome, Alaska, noted in her keynote address at the convening, “Indigenous Peoples have contributed the least to climate change, and yet we are the most impacted... and are the most vulnerable to climate change. We are the ones living closest to the land. We have a very vital and important role to play.”

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The Climate Crisis in Global Perspective

A persistent refrain at the First Peoples’ Convening was exasperation with climate change denial. When politicians and members of the general public question the seriousness of human-made climate change, it discounts the devastating climate effects that these communities are already suffering and the real and deadly threats that the crisis poses to their futures. This report does not give space to again catalog all of the evidence that climate change is real. Instead, it highlights the demand by participants at the First Peoples’ Convening that global leaders acknowledge the severity of the crisis and take immediate action.

At the 21st Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), states adopted the Paris Agreement, which set the goal of limiting global warming to less than 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels—and ideally no more than 1.5 degrees. But for communities at the First Peoples’ Convening, even if the goal of the Paris Agreement is reached, it may not come soon enough to stop their displacement. The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) now predicts that at current rates there will be three degrees or more of warming. Warming in the Arctic is already happening at more than twice the rate of the rest of the planet, with devastating consequences, making the global targets seem moot. Some analysis shows that even with a 1.5-degree limit to the warming, sea levels may still rise more than 40 centimeters over the next 100 years, inundating atoll nations and fouling water supplies.

Instead of a radical target, the implementation of the Paris Agreement should be seen as only the ground floor to address the climate crisis. Yet, the international community has utterly failed to advance this goal. Greenhouse gases actually increased over the last year. The United States recently pulled out
of the Paris Agreement, Poland touted coal power at the venue where it hosted the UNFCCC in December 2018, and member states spent time at the summit challenging the findings of the IPCC’s recent report, rather than discussing ways to follow through on their commitments.

Indigenous Values and Knowledge Systems

While global leaders stall, participants at the First Peoples’ Convening are responding to the climate crisis. Indigenous Peoples are often identified as being particularly “vulnerable” to climate change impacts, and those risks were evident as participants at the First Peoples’ Convening shared their stories. They are at risk for a variety of reasons. Foundationally, Indigenous communities rely on local species, habitats, and ecosystems that are impacted by climate change. But those risks are elevated due to the long-term effects of colonialism, institutionalized racism, and histories of forced relocation.

But we must equally recognize that Indigenous Peoples are resilient and have preserved their traditional ways of life for thousands of years. The broader academic, policy-making, and practitioner community increasingly acknowledges that traditional knowledge (or, specifically, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, TEK) is a crucial component of durable solutions to climate change adaptation and can be combined with Western climate science to achieve better results. For Indigenous Peoples, incorporating and building on existing TEK engages a trusted source of information that has facilitated adaptation date. As the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples noted,

> “We are a spiritual people with ancestral knowledge. We are the stewards of the land. We have inherent rights. We are inclusive and empowered and we are the first peoples of the world.”
> — John Pingayaq, Chevak, Alaska

Indigenous peoples are committed to protect, use and apply traditional knowledge and practices to implement solutions and ways to adapt to climate change within indigenous communities. Climate change solutions cannot be limited to Western scientific knowledge, but must include indigenous peoples’ traditional knowledge, innovations and
practices, which have historically contributed to the efforts of conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity.

Unfortunately, much climate research continues without considering traditional knowledge or even fully engaging and consulting with Indigenous communities.

For some participants the climate crisis is yet more evidence that we collectively need to turn to Indigenous Peoples and their Elders to learn sustainable and Indigenous practices that have sustained their cultures for millennia. As Elder John Pingayaq, of Chevak, put it, “We need to relearn our way of survival.”

“It’s inspiring to me how people are moving, doing research, without resources. [It’s] awesome that people are working toward the bigger picture. We are the start of this. We are the first people that are experiencing all this. It will hit other people some day; they will have to ask us how we adapted. We are going to be the ones that know, because we are the ones who had to go through it first.”

— Angela Johnson, Nelson Lagoon, Alaska
Alaska

Representatives from Atmautluak, Bill Moore’s Slough, Chevak, Elim, Eyak, Golovin, Hamilton, Kotlik, Kwigillingok, Kivalina, Mary’s Igloo, Nelson Lagoon, Newtok, Nunapitchuk, Port Heiden, Shishmaref, Teller, and Unalakleet shared the impacts of the climate crisis on their communities. Alaska’s population of 737,000 includes people from over 200 Alaska Native villages. The climate crisis is severe in this region, which lies close to the Arctic Circle, with record-breaking high temperatures contributing to thawing permafrost and a rapid decline in Arctic sea ice. Indigenous communities are struggling with reduced and unpredictable subsistence harvests, sea-level rise, poor water quality, flooding and rapid shoreline erosion, and damage to buildings and infrastructure.
Participants described dramatic and destructive erosion and flooding that threaten their safety and ability to continue age-old cultural practices that are a part of their cultural identity. Mayor Richard Tuluk, of Chevak, described how his community had already moved to higher ground, but the new site is also experiencing rapidly rising water levels and bluff erosion at a projected rate of five feet per year. Leann Symbol told how erosion had reached Chevak’s landfill, and now trash, gas, and fencing had fouled the river. In Elim, erosion is destroying the cliffs on which the village sits, bringing sand into the traditional camp area. Elder Moses Pavilla, of Atmautluak, reflected that “the land is disappearing... Over 80 feet have eroded already. During the [spring] breakup, the water gets so high that it reaches the houses on the south side of the village. A lot has changed since I was a child.”

Higher sea and river levels increase the danger of flooding and storms. Elder John Pingayaaq noted that “the most dangerous part is the surge from the ocean when the tides come in along with the ice.” Similarly, in Port Heiden, Scott Anderson said that “this used to be our lagoon, our safe harbor... We had a nice road that went down there, a main road... now... the lagoon is completely gone.” The lack of a safe harbor is hard on ocean-going equipment and makes
storm surges with ice break-up more dangerous. John Pius Henry, Jr., of Unalakleet, described extremely rapid erosion along the river in his area. Last summer, his father’s cabin was four feet above the river and 3.5 feet from the bank. This year the bank was gone. In another area, the river had encroached 10 feet toward another house in a single year.

Participants from Alaska repeatedly noted the devastating impacts of extreme and unpredictable weather on their communities. Scott Anderson noted an increase in major storm events with westerly winds that bring in high tides and cause rapid erosion of the land. Mary Albrite, of Atmautluak, described how her community used to have snow up to the roofs in winter, so high that they could slide down them. “Now we don’t see snowstorms like that. It is mostly a sheet of ice.” Pamela Smith, of Eyak, distilled the impact of weather changes as “dramatic... tragic.” In recent years, they had one winter with 45 feet of snow, causing fear and trauma, and then two years with temperatures so high that there was only rain and ice.

Multiple participants referred to the emotional toll that extreme weather has taken on their community. Victor Tonuchuk, Jr., of Kotlik, described how “during the fall season we’re always worried... about what the weather’s going to be like, if it is going to flood this year. It gets pretty scary thinking about the floods, especially when it’s getting cold out... Ice and water could be very dangerous and destructive... When it comes in with the tide, it pushes in the ice, and when the ice piles up, it could do a lot of damage.” He described how a flood in November 2013 was more like a “spring break-up,” with ice flowing in and piling up within a 15-mile radius of the river. “It was something scary to witness.”
Researchers anticipate that at current rates the Arctic will experience six to nine degrees of warming. High temperatures in Alaska have already had devastating impacts on the ice and permafrost that these communities sit and rely on.

Alaska Native communities rely on thick sea ice and predictable hardening and break-up for their traditional hunting and fishing practices. As Adelaine Ahmasuk, of Nome, noted, “ice conditions are no longer the way they were about 20 to 30 years ago. So, right now a lot of the ice conditions at wintertime are deteriorating and [making it] very dangerous for our snow machines to go down, along with our boats.”21 Paul Nagaruk, of Elim, reported that this spring, a hole in the creek appeared in early March,” probably warmed by an underground spring. “It’s been so warm that the ice doesn’t get as thick anymore.”22 Eunice Brown, of Unalakleet, explained how the areas where she used to fish in the winter did not freeze last year. “In December people were going upriver by boat, not snow machine.”23 Darrel John, of Kwigillingok, also explained the changes he has seen in seasonal weather:

We used to have snow drifts as high as three stories… That no longer happens… I no longer see that. We used to have blizzard conditions starting in December to late February. That no longer exists. We used
to have negative 20, negative 60 [degrees] starting in mid-January to probably early March, late February. And we no longer have that, and that has a major effect on our hunting grounds. We need the cold weather. There’s hardly any more snow. It hardly snows any more. Most of the winter time is glare ice... We used to have one flood season, and that mostly occurred in September or October... We now have floods from October through January.

Angela Johnson, of Nelson Lagoon, also described changed weather patterns:

Before, in our past winters, we would have beautiful ice build-up on the Bering Sea side, and the river would freeze over, and we would be able to do ice fishing... And now we barely get any ice... Without the ice protection on the Bering Sea during the winters, we have extreme storms that just beat up the banks. And it’s happening quicker and getting worse every year because of the way the climate is changing. This is a problem for our food security, our safety, and our fishing industry.

She noted fishing is inextricably tied to the community’s cultural identity.24 Some Alaskan villages sit on permafrost—which has historically been frozen ground. Now, that permafrost is disappearing, causing major damage and contributing to erosion and flooding. In Nunapitchuk, the permafrost is melting. As Golga Frederick explained, “now with the erosion and [disappearing] permafrost working together, we are losing the land very fast.”25 Morris Alexie described how the permafrost is “very soft... very loose... Once you have trampled on the tundra, it will deteriorate. It will easily break and easily sink... Every building you see in the village is slanted or warped. We might level it up, but by the next spring, it is slanted again. There is no hard ground.” Likewise, Mary Albrite, of Atmautluak, described how “most of the village is sinking slowly.”26
Bangladesh

Bangladesh routinely experiences disasters, such as river and coastal flooding, storm surges, cyclones, landslides, and droughts, which lead to the displacement of individual families and communities. Increases in tidal height and tidal flooding in coastal and river delta regions are primary causes of displacement. It is estimated that by 2050, with a projected 50-centimeter rise in the sea level, Bangladesh may lose approximately 11 percent of its land, affecting an estimated 15 million people living in low-lying coastal areas. An additional four million people living on “chars” (river islands) are considered “immediately threatened” by climate hazards. Millions of Bangladeshis have already migrated away from river delta regions to urban centers, where it is estimated that up to 50 percent of those living in urban informal settlements were forced to leave their homes due to riverbank erosion.
Mohammad Shahjahan, of Young Power in Social Action (YPSA), described how both slow- and sudden-onset events are impacting Bangladesh. YPSA is working as the focal point of climate-displacement issues for ensuring the rights of climate-displaced people in Bangladesh. The organization is not Indigenous-led but works for all climate-displaced communities in Bangladesh, including ethnic minority and fisher folk communities and other impacted groups. He explained that of 64 districts in the country, 26 are generating climate displacement by slow and sudden onset events. The Trend and Impact Analysis of Internal Displacement done by the government in 2014 reported that 29 percent of respondents from hazard-prone areas had been temporarily displaced and at risk of permanent displacement and 12 percent were permanently displaced. Only 13 percent of residents in risk-prone regions reported that they had never been displaced.
Mississippi Delta

Leaders of the Atakapa-Ishak, Isle de Jean Charles, and Pointe-Au-Chien Tribes in Louisiana also joined the convening. The banks around the Mississippi Delta in southern Louisiana are sinking, because of a combination of rising sea levels and the loss of natural sediment deposits resulting from new levees and the effects of extractive industries—including 10,000 miles of canals dredged through wetlands by the oil and gas industries. Southern Louisiana faces increased temperatures, extreme weather events, rising sea levels, coastal erosion, and the potential displacement of coastal communities. In the coming years, Louisiana expects more flood damage, reduced crop yields, and destruction of estuaries and fisheries from climate change.

The tribes in these areas had been flourishing communities that were in some cases as much as 50 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico, but the deteriorating coastline has brought the waters quite literally to their doorsteps. Since 1955, the Isle de Jean Charles band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw has lost 98 percent of their land. Chief Albert Naquin, of Isle de Jean Charles, shared images showing how the marshland has washed away over time. Rosina Philippe, of the Atakapa-Ishak Tribe, described how her community has raised homes off the ground and is committed to remaining where they are—even if they have to become a village of houseboats—in order to maintain their connection to their traditional waterways.31
Tuvalu, my country,
Our place of birth,
Where we grew up in bliss,
Now we see and hear
Cautious signs and feelings.
Beware of the rising sea levels.
Tuvalu song32

Pacific Islands

Representatives of Indigenous communities in Fiji, Kiribati, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu shared how the climate crisis has impacted them. The people of the Pacific Islands, most of whom are Indigenous to their lands, have been called the “barometer” for climate displacement. The IPCC has projected that without strong moves to curb carbon emissions, seas will rise three feet by 2050, inundating large percentages of low-lying atoll countries, like the Pacific Islands. The IPCC has projected that two-thirds of Kiribati, for instance, could be inundated.33 Slow-onset disasters, such as sea-level rise, flooding, saltwater intrusion, and drought, have impacted a significant percentage of people in the region. For example, 94 percent of households in Kiribati and 97 percent in Tuvalu have experienced climate hazards. While these hazards can lead to internal displacement or migration, relocation is seen as a last resort. Pacific Island governments and organizations are instead pushing developed countries to reduce their emissions and provide resources to support adaptation and compensation for the loss and damage caused by climate change.
All of the participants from the Pacific described the cocktail of climate change impacts that threaten their health and survival. As Makereta Waqa-vonovono, of Fiji, noted, “Climate change impacts include sea-level rise, warming of the oceans, and bleaching of our coral reefs, and then we have sudden events, extreme events, like cyclones, which are now becoming more frequent and more intense.” She also described worsening water and food security, frequent supercharged cyclones, severe heat waves, coral reefs and marine life destroyed, low-lying areas underwater, frequent flooding, droughts leading to loss of crops, and warming oceans leading to loss of fish stocks. The Fiji government has identified 61 coastal communities in need of relocation in the immediate future.

In the Solomon Islands, David Boseto works with communities who have already been displaced by rising seas. He noted that, “We have had five islands disappear due to coastal erosion and sea level rise.” On Nusa Hope, for instance, 35 families relocated 30 kilometers away to customary lands on the mainland due to sea-level rise. Tekamangu Tuune, of the disability rights organization Te Toa Matoa, in Kiribati, described the increasing king tides, droughts from lack of rain that contribute to salt in drinking water, and rising seas. Rising and warming seas have significantly impacted the livelihoods of island communities. Boseto described one of the communities he has worked with on Wagina Island, where communities of seaweed farmers used to be surrounded by land, but “due to coastal erosion, now... live on an island that is surrounded by the ocean.” Wayne Andrew, of the Hatohobei Organization for People and Environment in Palau, described how the oceans are getting warmer and the fish are moving further away. “These countries supply the world with tuna. It is not only being overfished, but moving to colder places.”

Ironically, along with rising seas, climate change has caused drier weather, drought, and reduced available drinking water throughout the Pacific.

<<[When] it’s happening to you, you have mountains you can climb. It is happening to us... but we are flat... if we are covered with sea, that is it. But we believe there is a God who is still looking out for us, and we hope that we will never get to that worst scenario.>> — Rine Ueara, of Kiribati
As Mark Stege, of the Marshall Islands, noted of recent droughts, “There have been some really significant ones in the last five years—2013 was a declared disaster, 2016 was a declared disaster, and it’s been very early and often. It seems we’ve been getting droughts, as the conversation about climate change has become more elevated in national discourse. So we’ve been very mindful of droughts as a climate impact.”

Boseto described how an I-Kiribati community in the Solomon Islands has had a longer dry season and were running out of water. “They rely on wells... The wells are now contaminated by both salt water and e coli” and “there’s not enough water for drinking, washing, or cooking, preventing students from going to school during water shortages.” He works with an NGO called Ecological Solutions to install rainwater catchment tanks, so families can preserve rainwater for household use.

“A long time ago, when I was maybe 10 or 11 years old, my grandfather took me out fishing. We were standing out by the ocean on some rocks and my Pa was standing on a rock with a spear in his hand and a smile on his face waiting for dinner to swim by. He told me that we come from a long line of boat builders and fishermen and that the ocean would always be kind to us. This was my Pa’s truth, his story, and his story was what put food on the table for my mother and her siblings. Growing up, I have come to learn that the very same thing that has nourished my family for generations will now potentially destroy us.” — Fenton Lutunatabua, of Fiji, Pacific Climate Warriors
Washington

The federally recognized Quinault Indian Tribe resides on the Pacific coast of the Olympic Peninsula, west of Seattle. The Quinault Indian Reservation is the largest coastal Indian reservation in the United States, comprising 23 miles of coastline at risk of rising sea levels, flooding, and erosion. The Quinaults are faced with the dual threat of sea-level rise and destruction of their villages by a tsunami triggered by the Cascadia Subduction Zone off the Washington Coast, which is expected to produce a tsunami similar to the 2005 Indonesia quake. The tsunami could flood the Village of Taholah with waters up to 50 feet high. The large quakes happen, on average, every 300 to 500 years. It has been 318 years since the last large quake.

Almost half of the residents in the Taholah, located at the point where the Quinault River meets the Pacific Ocean, rely on salmon fishing for their livelihood. Salmon stock have been adversely impacted by sea-level rise, ocean acidification, and warmer ocean waters resulting from climate change, as well as the loss of glaciers feeding the Quinault River. The loss of glaciers reduces the summer and early autumn river flow and raises water temperatures, adversely affecting salmon runs. Sea-level rise is expected to increase by approximately one foot by 2100. A plan is underway to relocate approximately 650 residents and community facilities to higher ground about a half-mile away, above flood and tsunami zones.
For Indigenous Peoples, climate change impacts go much deeper than ruined infrastructure, frightening storms, struggling industries, or even lost homes. The changes taking place throughout these regions are altering—and in some cases threatening to destroy—the unique cultural and sustainable practices that define their very identity.

Elder John Pingayaq, of Chevak, told the convening that his community is “the People of the Kashunuk River.” Researchers who did a survey of rivers and traditional and historic sites in the area found a 1,006-year-old site and a ceremonial mound that was over 50 feet tall, of which “now only about 10 feet [is] visible.” He reflected on the traditional and communal practices that sustained his ancestors: “Our people are always in preparation. Preparation for disaster... When some natural disaster affects our people, we are prepared to help one another. That is the way our ancestors survived. All of them, without money. They all got together and went to the ‘safe, safe place.’ That is the way our ancestors did for us. And that is what we need to follow.”

Similarly, Pamela, of Eyak, explained that when she was little, the Elders said, “You have to get everyone together and learn to prepare for the bad times.” Jack Fagerstrom, of Golovin, described the loss of historic sites in his community and that one of the community’s graveyards is threatened by erosion. Participants from Kwigillingok also reported losing cultural spaces: “We have two old cemeteries that are no longer being used... Some of the grave sites are lakes and ponds. We used to be situated on a high bluff, and we no longer have that. The old village, it is now maybe two miles out in the ocean.”

Some of the communities’ very names signify their connection to the lands. But the lands are quickly becoming inundated by water. As Golga Frederick, of Nunapitchuk, explained, “Nunapitchuk means ‘small tundra land.’” The community was originally small family groups who had settled in the area because of the abundance of subsistence foods. Bernice Sallison told that, “what I heard, Elders used to say, in 20 or more years, Nunapitchuk will just be water.” Darrel John, of Kwigillingok, pointing to a photo of a village by a large river, said, “Kwigillingok... means ‘land with no river.’ And now we have a river.”

Rising temperatures and unpredictable weather have devastating impacts on traditional sustainable practices, such as hunting, fishing, and gathering of wild edibles. As Adelaine Ahmasuk noted, “the big thing that I am worried about, and that drew me into this work, is that people are losing their ability to subsist off the land and their hunting and subsistence rights. [I want to ensure that] they have access to their traditional foods, and camps where they go hunt. It is changing. They’re not being able to get there by snow machine or boat anymore.”

In Louisiana, where rising water and salt-water intrusion have changed habitats, Indigenous Peoples are adapting to a new reality. For instance, Theresa Dardar, of Pointe-au-Chien, explained that her community is within the hurricane-protection levees built by the state, but the water is still encroaching and
their land is eroding away. For now, they still live off the land and the water. She
gardens and helps to provide fresh produce for the community. Her husband is
a commercial fisherman, catching shrimp, crab, and oyster. He used to trap for
nutrias and muskrats behind the house, but now they use crab traps there.

Pamela Smith, of Eyak, described how she usually picks 40 gallons of ber-
ries every season, but in the past two years there have been none. Similarly,
there were no fish runs in the last two years. Pamela Smith described the chang-
es over the last 40 years as “like putting a frying pan on the fire and slowly turn-
ing the heat up.” Paul Nagaruk, of Elim, expressed his fear, “It makes me worried
for the people that go out—that is, how we get our food.” Angela Johnson, of
Nelson Lagoon, described how in their community, the fishing sites are held by
families. “Their permits, they are all family business and part of our culture and
who we are. Our location is very important because that is where the fish come
every year to get to their spawning streams... Will my kids be able to fish at my
fishing sites? I don’t know.” Kwigillingok representatives also described how
the very short snow season (now only one month long in recent years, instead
of the typical five or more months) means that the hunting season is extremely
short. Last year, Darrel John explained that the sea ice was closer, so they caught
no walruses. Gavin Phillip worried about the short hunting season: “The sea ice
will be gone by April 15 or 30... that is where they get their food for the next 12
months. It is creating hazards for [the hunters].”

As Makereta Waqavonovono noted, climate change has had severe impacts
on community food security: “Extremes in temperature mean that communities
cannot plant the food they normally rely on. They cannot fish in the oceans be-
cause the fish have been depleted due to the warming of the oceans, and the
rising salt water has intruded into their plantations and groundwater sources.”
Tanya Eison, of The Quinault Indian Nation, reported:

We’re also seeing declines in salmon populations, and we’ve experienced
a few hypoxia events. We had a beach to the north of us that was littered with
razor clams, and they died off, almost all of them, on the beach. We also have a
cove on our reservation where we see bottom fish die off, and fish and crab, and
they wash up on the shore, and you can’t take two steps without seeing a new
one. Those didn’t occur when I was younger, and I’m told that wasn’t a normal
thing, and now it’s almost a yearly summer event.

Matini Vailopa described how on Tuvalu, the second smallest atoll nation in
the Pacific, climate devastation has affected traditional culture and the way of liv-
ing. In some ways, the change in weather patterns has influenced people’s interest
in sharing and caring for others. Although many people in Tuvalu still care about
supporting island and national communities, it is now often considered wise to
store fish in the refrigerator for bad weather conditions rather then sharing, be-
cause “people are now more concerned for their children’s future, their immediate
family, and the loss of their land and resources.” On Kiribati, people live close to
each other, in sleeping structures with open sides and open doors, which is “more
communal.” Rine Ueara, of Kiribati, explained how difficult it is for I-Kiribati who
migrate away from the island and have to live “alone, with shut doors.”
Many participants in the convening shared insights that First and Indigenous Peoples have learned by listening to their Elders and a sense that the current generations need to relearn the traditional ways of living that the Elders practiced and understood.

Matini Vailopa, of Tuvalu, explained that, “[Elders] have traditional knowledge for weather forecasting and strategies. For example, a breadfruit tree baring too many fruits indicates that cyclones are coming. But increasing weather irregularities may hamper traditional forecast and coping strategies.” Wayne Andrew, of Palau, agreed:

Our Elders knew a lot about how to live with the land and the ocean. But we didn’t pay attention. The young people didn’t pay attention to the knowledge. They took it for granted that now we are modern... Our Elders are passing... and all of this knowledge is slowly getting away. And, really, this is the knowledge [that gives us] “true resilience” over long generations of people living with the ocean and the land.
Vailopa offered an example of a lost strategy that he has since learned from Elders: “They used to make canoe houses... easy to move and rebuild when big typhoons and storms come through. And you have to build [structures] behind the tallest tree. Now you put a lot of money into building these structures... You don’t think about the tallest tree.”

Victor Tonuchuk, Jr., of Kotlik, reflected, “The stories my dad told me, they never really experienced flooding... only once in a great while. They were not always worried about floods.” Moses Pavilla, of Atmautluak, said, “When I was growing up, I used to hang around Elders, and they used to talk about [how] Alaska is going to slowly get warmer and the lower 48 is going to get colder slowly.” Darrel John, of Kwigillingok, shared that his Elders used to say that one day Alaska would no longer have a cold weather climate and they would experience strange weather conditions.

“I will go back with a full heart. It’s amazing to know what the whole world is going through. One of my Elders talked about connection with the water. If you feel alone, put your hand in the water and know that you’re connected with each other.” — First Peoples Convening Participant
Global Platforms on Climate-Forced Displacement

Climate-forced displacement is a growing area of concern for international governing bodies, but action at the international level falls far short of addressing the urgent needs of communities like those who met at the First Peoples’ Convening.

As their accounts illustrated, communities and individuals at risk of climate-forced displacement face threats to a wide range of rights, from their right to health, water, and housing to their rights to move freely and maintain and practice one’s culture. States have a responsibility to uphold the rights of displaced people. A variety of international treaties and principles offer guidance on these issues.

It is estimated that the vast majority of those who face climate displacement will remain within the borders of their own country. The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement were created in the 1990s in response to a growing displacement crisis. But they do not specifically refer to or include climate-forced displacement.

The Nansen Initiative grew out of the adoption of the Cancun Agreements in 2010, recognizing the severity of climate-induced migration and displacement as challenges related to climate-change adaptation. Between 2011 and 2015, a multi-stakeholder process developed the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda for those displaced by disasters. The Nansen Initiative noted that the vast majority of states lack any sort of legal framework for providing humanitarian protection to displaced people and offered recommendations. After its endorsement in 2015, the work was then carried forward by the Platform on Disaster Displacement.

The Global Compact for Migration (GCM), adopted in December 2018, provides further guidance to states on how to strengthen their commitments to facilitate safe, orderly, and regular migration across borders and acknowledges climate change as a driver of migration. While nonbinding, the GCM is a positive step toward actively engaging civil society and community organizations from across the globe and very intentionally centers on human rights. It is the first global policy to address a number of root causes of migration, including economic disaster, violence, and climate change.
At the 24th Conference of Parties (COP 24) to the UNFCCC in December 2018, the Task Force on Displacement under the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage presented a set of recommendations. Unfortunately, the Executive Committee removed any reference to financing to address the “loss and damage” experienced by communities as a result of climate change, especially displacement. This is a prime example of the ways in which international climate negotiations are not grappling with the full extent of climate change impacts—including the very real losses and damage to property, livelihoods, and culture that First and Indigenous Peoples are experiencing now.

Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform
One positive step in the last year is the development of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform within the UNFCCC.62 This platform should offer Indigenous Peoples a space to share adaptation and mitigation strategies and provide a new, direct line of communication between Indigenous Peoples’ representatives and the UNFCCC President. But as Michael Charles noted in his closing remarks at the International Indigenous Peoples’ Forum on Climate Change at COP 24 in Poland, “Our indigenous way of knowing, rooted in the experience of our ancestors, is the medicine this sick world needs right now... However, our millennia of experience in ecological guardianship should not be restricted to one Platform.” He echoed the call at the First Peoples’ Convening for leadership from Indigenous Peoples to embrace Indigenous knowledge “across all streams of climate action.”63
First and Indigenous Peoples Call for a Paradigm Shift

Few representatives of Indigenous Peoples participated in the development of the international principles and guidelines outlined above, and the pace of government action on climate change is far too slow to mitigate the threats of displacement for communities. The First Peoples’ Convening demanded a paradigm shift in the current state-down climate frameworks toward one founded on the acknowledgment of Indigenous Peoples as stewards of the land and holders of the solutions to today’s climate crisis.

Human Rights and Climate Displacement

There is currently no comprehensive legal framework—at the international, regional, or state level—for protecting the rights and facilitating the movement of climate-displaced individuals or people. Individuals and communities who are acutely impacted by climate impacts face a myriad of threats to their human rights; yet, the international community does not currently recognize how the specific rights of people who are or may be displaced by climate change will be impacted.

Because there is no durable legal framework protecting the rights of those displaced by climate change, there are glaring gaps in rights protections for displaced people, especially for the right to life, self-determination, access to food, housing, and standard of living, right to work, and cultural and physical heritage. Communities that remain in place and attempt to adapt to slow-onset climate events also face myriad threats to their human rights, especially rights to food, water, sanitation, work, standard of living, property, education, sustainable development, free prior informed consent, self-determination, health, housing, culture/heritage, collective rights, sovereignty, and even life.

SPOTLIGHT: RIGHTS OF PERSONS LIVING WITH DISABILITIES

“Persons with disabilities are more vulnerable. Persons without disabilities can run, but what about persons who can’t walk? We need a plan for saving lives,” explained Teka Tuune. “Persons with disabilities have been moved from their place because of the high tides... the island is being heated by climate change, by the sea. So they move to the middle land, and they stayed with their families or religious groups. But there’s no existing plans at this time for persons with disabilities.”

People in Kiribati living with disabilities face continued challenges because their needs have not been incorporated into the state’s climate change and disaster risk policies. There is no sign-language interpretation for warning signs or information for deaf people, for instance. Assistive devices are unaffordable. In order to develop adequate policies and procedures, representatives from disabled people’s organizations must be at decision-making and planning meetings for responding to climate change.
The Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous Peoples possess distinct collective rights under international law and many domestic legal frameworks. Central treaties upholding these rights include the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (International Labor Organization Convention 169, ILO 169) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Many states also recognize the sovereign rights of Indigenous Peoples. In the United States, federally recognized tribes often hold sovereignty over land, and their right to self-determination means that the federal government must consult directly with tribal governments before taking actions that might impact them. Under international law, other Indigenous Peoples, including unrecognized tribes, also maintain the right to self-determination, which scholars note is tied to “internal, cultural, and community-based” sovereignty that is a part of Indigenous Peoples’ identity.

Climate-forced displacement directly threatens some of the key rights recognized by ILO 169 and UNDRIP. It challenges Indigenous communities’ very right to self-determination (“the freely expressed will of peoples”) because climate change threatens to force people from their homelands—which are connected to their traditional, cultural, and livelihood practices. Indigenous communities’ collective rights must be acknowledged and protected in the face of climate change. This means that climate relocation or migration planning that is predicated on individual or family-level concepts of land ownership may not suit the needs of Indigenous communities or regions where land is held in common. Further, UNDRIP recognizes that the right to maintain Indigenous culture is linked to the rights to land and resources. When people are forced from their lands (or seas), they risk losing traditional cultural practices along with their heritage sites.

In order to fully protect the right to self-determination, states must create legal frameworks and policies that place communities, and First and Indigenous Peoples in particular, at the center of climate-change planning. Indigenous
Peoples should be engaged, consulted, and provided with opportunities for free, prior, and informed consent. But beyond that, community members should be actively engaged and supported to monitor climate-change impacts, such as sea-level rise and erosion that impact them, and they should be empowered to lead planning efforts. Above all, the right to self-determination demands that states must allow Indigenous communities to decide for themselves whether and when they relocate. Most of the communities at the First Peoples’ Convening intend to remain in their traditional lands, and states must support their right to remain and build protections for their homes, infrastructure, subsistence lands and waters, and cultural heritage sites.

Ten years after the adoption of UNDRIP, the Report of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples noted with alarm the persistent failure of states and development agencies to recognize these rights, seek informed consent, or protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples to their lands, resources, and cultural practices. Indeed, the report noted that Indigenous Peoples are routinely killed for trying to protect their lands and rights from exploitation. The failure to consult and include Indigenous Peoples in planning related to their own communities is replicated in state-down approaches to climate adaptation and planning for potential climate displacement.

Communities Need Funding
In order to ensure their right to self-determination, Indigenous communities need access to funding and other resources to continue to face and plan for climate-change impacts. Yet, international financing for climate adaptation and mitigation is largely inaccessible to them. The global climate financing architecture—including the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, Global Environmental Facility, and bilateral and multilateral funding agreements—is designed by states for states, to help developing countries adapt to climate change and reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. These funds are not designed to be ac-
We have values and traditional knowledge that can be used as a way to navigate climate change as a resilient people.
— David Boseto, Solomon Islands

cessed directly by communities or sovereign Peoples within a state, and many states do not engage communities adequately, especially First and Indigenous Peoples, to address their needs.

There are currently no international funds dedicated to climate-induced relocation or migration. Indeed, most individuals and families who are displaced now bear the costs of relocation themselves. Neither are there funds dedicated to compensate for the loss and damage that communities incur as a result of climate change, including cultural loss, such as the loss of artifacts, burial sites, cultural lands, traditional practices, and values. To date, funds allocated to help Indigenous communities relocate have come from a combination of government programs, private funds, institutions, and bilateral funds.

Communities facing climate-displacement struggle to access the funds they need to adapt and plan. Convening participants noted that funding requirements are overly technical, time consuming, and sparse. There is no clear legal framework or system in place to coordinate and support the needs of these communities. Participants reported that they often have to hire a grant writer to apply for funds and struggle to identify appropriate or available funders. Many feel that they spend so much time applying for funding that it takes time away from their critical work. As Wayne Andrew reflected:

I have realized that we have worked so hard to find money to solve our problems, but a lot of the solutions are with us, but we have been looking outside... We do need the money, but we are spending money and time to get grants, but not actually solving the problem... The problem is still there... We need to find ways to get money to the communities.

Participants shared examples of the ways in which they have garnered funding for adaptation and mitigation from a patchwork of sources, including: the Denali Commission, the Environmental Protection Agency’s Indian Environmental General Assistance Program, the US Army Corps of Engineers, the US Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Native Americans Environmental Regulatory Enhancement, Social and Economic Development Strategies, US Department of Housing and Urban Development, US Department of Treasury; other state and national government agencies; the private sector; and large and small international nongovernmental organizations. Participants noted that grant writing becomes—quite literally—a full-time job, yet there are not nearly enough available funds or technical resources.

**Collective Resilience**

As noted earlier, traditional knowledge is crucial to finding durable solutions to climate change. Robin Bronen, of the Alaska Institute for Justice, recalled how during the Newtok community’s relocation planning and discussions about the risk of permafrost thaw at the proposed relocation site, it was important to document traditional knowledge to inform the US Army Corps of Engineers, Denali Commission, and other actors. In Kivalina, she noted, the Army Corps did not
trust the Tribe’s traditional knowledge.\textsuperscript{71} Participants from the Marshall Islands, Isle de Jean Charles, Louisiana, and elsewhere had similar experiences of government officials and researchers discounting or ignoring traditional knowledge.

Climate change research and monitoring are areas where Indigenous Peoples participation, let alone expertise and knowledge, is sorely needed, yet routinely devalued. Studies show that the IPCC—the leading international forum for assessing climate change—has historically devalued and excluded Indigenous Peoples’ perspectives and knowledge.\textsuperscript{72} As Cochran et al. argue, “Indigenous Alaskans have lived off the land and sea for thousands of years with minimal connection to the global economy” and have developed traditional knowledge that has allowed them to survive and sometimes thrive in the north, while developing skills for dealing with variability in the environment that could offer strategies for responding to climate change.\textsuperscript{73} Nevertheless, Indigenous Peoples have more often been the subject of studies rather than the authors of this work. Mark Stege, of the Marshall Islands, explained:

\begin{quote}
I think there’s more work that needs to be done to quantify the climate changes at the local levels. And to do that—to mobilize and be able to do so much research—I think the local communities who live \textit{in situ} are the most well positioned. One of the challenges that I’m seeing is a lack of recognition of the local logistical benefits that engaging with the local partners can provide.\textsuperscript{74}
\end{quote}

Stege is engaged in efforts to develop a participatory process for creation and use of local climate driver data by conducting community consultation sessions with Elders and historical knowledge holders in Maloelap Atoll. The process incorporates the community’s prior knowledge of flood risk with a high-resolution topographic elevation survey to develop future flood projections.

Patricia Cochran, during her plenary remarks at the First Peoples Convening, argued that, “The only solutions that really and truly work are the ones that come from communities.”\textsuperscript{75}

Participants at the First Peoples’ Convening discussed the need to document and share traditional knowledge. In fact, the Pacific working group identified documentation of and training on traditional knowledge to strengthen resilience as a key regional goal for the near future.

At the same time, participants from the United States and the Pacific grappled with the difficulties of documenting traditional knowledge and how they should and should not be used. Participants from Kiribati noted that traditional knowledge, like traditional navigation, is held by families and that it would be inappropriate to share it with the broader community. A working group on traditional knowledge discussed a distinction between “insider knowledge” and “outsider knowledge” in relation to which types of traditional knowledge would be most appropriate to try to document or share. The group discussed possible means of securing or copyrighting documented traditional knowledge, but some participants noted that existing laws do not fully protect Indigenous Peoples’ rights to this knowledge and that mechanisms such as copyright and intellectual
property law, for instance, are insufficient for this purpose. Jacinta Helin, of the Carteret Islands, highlighted the first step, ensuring that traditional knowledge are shared within communities, from Elders to youth: “Make sure someone in the community has the traditional knowledge. All the knowledge doesn’t need to be documented. It’s our duty to encourage Elders to share this knowledge with their own family and community.”

Traditional knowledge is a critical component of addressing climate change and shifting away from the paradigm of exploiting people, land, and resources for profit that has led to the climate crisis we now face. But we must also stress that Indigenous Peoples should never feel compelled to share their traditional knowledge and maintain the right not to participate in research and government initiatives around traditional knowledge.

Communities Shared Solutions
In spite of the glaring lack of rights protections and programs to support the climate mitigation, adaptation, and relocation needs of First and Indigenous Peoples, participants at the First Peoples’ Convening shared the impressive range of work they are currently doing to protect their communities. Many communities are developing monitoring strategies to collect data on the impacts of sea-level rise, flooding, erosion, drought, and permafrost thaw. Fifteen Alaska Native communities have joined together with the Alaska Institute for Justice to share knowledge and insights and develop relationships with state and federal agencies, like the National Weather Service, to help with disaster risk reduction and adaptation. The Marshall Islands Conservation Society is doing flood mapping and engaging communities in atoll habitability threshold research. Communities hope to put newly amassed data to use, as in Chevak, where erosion and permafrost monitoring data can inform a new hazard mitigation plan that they hope to use to seek new funding from the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

<<When I was a kid, we learned the forgiveness racket. We would keep on breaking stuff. Got a little older, and our parents would insist we fix it or pay for it. So we learned to fix it. This is western science, about fixing things that are broken. But we keep on breaking them. Eventually, I learned to use things properly and with respect. We have an ancestry of thousands of years of knowing how to use things properly and with respect.>>
— Richard Krajieski, Louisiana
Spotlight: YPSA

In Bangladesh, Young Power in Social Action (YPSA), in partnership with the NGO Displacement Solutions, has been working with displaced communities and other relevant stakeholders to enumerate and push for new norms and guidelines for government protection of climate-displaced peoples’ rights. They have developed reports that outline the key opportunities and needs related to protecting the rights of displaced peoples. In 2015, they produced a *Quick Guide on the Rights of Climate-Displaced Persons*. This guide briefly lists the human rights that climate-displaced people maintain, including the right to humanitarian assistance; the right to shelter and land; the right to food, water and sanitation; the right to freedom of movement; and the right to choose one’s own residence. It also provides recommendations and examples of how to organize and advocate for rights protections, including community organizing, seeking help from an NGO or a government agency, and seeking legal assistance.79

Now, YPSA is implementing a “One House, One Family at a Time” project to resettle people displaced by climate change. In 2016 they built four houses for four island families who faced dire risks, relocating them to mainland Bangladesh, not too far from their native island. YPSA also lobbies the government on behalf of climate-displaced persons to establish rights protections and policies. They have shared their work with the chief climate officer in Bangladesh. They are also working with the Climate Justice Resilience Fund on a large-scale relocation of climate displaced people to establish a model for the government and international organizations to follow. YPSA is developing strategies for how communities will engage in the relocation process, developing a community advocacy plan and an implementation plan for relocation. It is a leading advocate for “New Land for Lost Land, New Homes for Lost Homes” as the basis for the rights of climate-displaced peoples.80

Other communities, like the Quinault Indian Nation on the Olympic Peninsula, Carteret Islanders of Tulele Peisa, and Isle de Jean Charles of Louisiana are planning and implementing relocations to higher or safer ground. Participants stressed the importance of self-determination and community leadership in such relocation efforts. Reflecting on Newtok’s decades of work to implement a community relocation plan, Stanley Tom explained the importance of self-determination, recommending that Tribal governance entities work together to secure title to their lands before working with the local or federal government, and the importance of engaging Tribal members, not outsiders, in the relocation process. “We need to train our own Tribal people to move ourselves, so we retain control over our own community,” he said.
Participants voiced their hopes for future work: building unity and community, developing more youth leadership, building up emergency preparations, erosion controls, and early-warning systems, pursuing litigation and legislative and policy advocacy, and cultivating spaces in which Elders can share traditional knowledge with youth in order to build communities’ resilience in the face of climate change.

“The Pacific Climate Warriors work with 15 different islands and the Pacific Island diaspora to draw attention to the causes of climate impacts—telling the stories of climate impacts, but being very clear that while these climate impacts are real, they are not the only stories. We try to tell stories about the resilience of our people in the face of this climate crisis... There is a group of young people that are spreading hope around the world about how communities are actually thriving in the face of all this climate injustice.”

— Fenton Lutunatabua, of Fiji81
The participants who came together for the First Peoples’ Convening on Climate-Forced Displacement represent some of the Peoples most impacted by the climate crisis and are working to build solutions with woefully insufficient legal and funding frameworks. The convening was a space where the devastating impacts of today’s climate crisis could be shared. At the same time, the hope, power, and resilience of First and Indigenous Peoples shone a light out of the darkness toward a future in which Indigenous communities, and all communities, can thrive, where we can celebrate and affirm multiple ways of knowing, where states protect Indigenous Peoples’ right to self-determination, and where First and Indigenous Peoples lead the way toward an alternative, more sacred, and less exploitative connection to the Earth.

“Here we hope that by listening to all of you we can renew our commitment to our communities that there is true hope in gatherings like this.” — Fenton Lutunatabua, of Fiji

“There’s a bright future, there’s hope. Our ancestors went through a lot of trying times, some worse than what we’ve seen. They made it. We are here and strong and united. We are the ones who are going to help the rest of the world survive. We are here to be stewards of the land. It’s a pretty heavy thing to place on everyone’s shoulders, but we need to share it with the rest of the world. You’re my power and you’re my family.” — Patricia Cochran
FIRST PEOPLES AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES WORKING DECLARATION

OCTOBER 2018

INTRODUCTION:

To God our creator and our Ancestral Spirits we give thanks and praise for the many gifts and blessings of nature and wisdom to all humankind.

1.1 We, the First Peoples and Indigenous Peoples representatives from Alaska (Atmautluak, Bill Moore’s Slough, Chevak, Elim, Eyak, Golovin, Hamilton, Kotlik, Kwigillingok, Kivalina, Mary’s Igloo, Nelson Lagoon, Newtok, Nunapitchuk, Port Heiden, Shishmaref, Teller, Unalakleet), Louisiana (Atakapa-Ishak, Isle de Jean, Pointe-Au-Chien), Washington (Quinault Indian Nation), Bangladesh, and the Pacific (Fiji, Kiribati, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu), hereby referred to as “Participants of the First Peoples’ Convening on Climate-Forced Displacement,” gathered here in Girdwood, Alaska, from October 1-4, 2018, to express our deep respect and appreciation to the People in whose lands we gathered.

1.2 We express our solidarity and the truth we are confronting as First Peoples and Indigenous Peoples living in the areas most vulnerable to the impacts of the climate crisis, including being forcefully displaced from our Land. We maintain the unbreakable human and sacred spiritual connection with our land, air, water, forests, sea ice, plants, animals, and our communities handed down to us from our ancestors.

1.3 We are deeply alarmed by the accelerating climatic devastation brought about by unsustainable development and natural events. We are experiencing profound and disproportionate adverse impacts on our cultures, lands, human and environmental health, human rights, spirituality, well-being, traditional systems and livelihoods, food systems and food security, local infrastructure, economic viability, and our very survival as First Peoples and Indigenous Peoples of the world.

1.4 We are communities accountable to one another and future generations to uphold and maintain our sovereign and inherent rights as Indigenous peoples of the world and to carry out our responsibility as stewards of this ancestral...
knowledge that has allowed us to survive in harmony with Mother Earth from
time immemorial.

1.5 We are a spiritual people empowered by values and beliefs that are urgently
needed today to elevate humanity to an inclusive and peaceful truth that is
based on an Indigenous knowledge system of the land, sea, and sky and on
observations gained from the Western knowledge system.

WE AFFIRM:

2.1 Our islands, delta, and arctic ecosystems are suffering the most extreme im-
pacts of the climate crisis. Our homelands, cultures, and spiritual and tradition-
al livelihoods are threatened by rising temperatures, permafrost loss, sea-level
rise, flooding, erosion, landslides, ocean acidification, storms, and other disasters.

2.2 We express the TRUTH that Mother Earth is no longer in a period of climate
change, but climate crisis. We, therefore, insist on an immediate end to the de-
struction and desecration of the elements of life.

2.3 Our issues and concerns are similar, and there is added value in our
collectiveness.

2.4 We condemn the role of the fossil fuel industry in causing the climate crisis
and call for the phase out of fossil fuel use, without infringing on the right to
development of Indigenous nations.

2.5 We reaffirm the commitment to progress the implementation of the intent of
the Paris Agreement and other UN and global treaties.

CALL TO ACTION:

3.1 We call upon our global leaders, especially the Conference of the Parties (COP)
to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and
its decision-making bodies to:

a. Recognize climate-displaced peoples and their rights and needs as a matter
of urgent concern and to take proactive measures to ensure that adequate
technical and financial support is afforded to them.

b. Appoint First Peoples and Indigenous Peoples representatives and focal
points in the UNFCCC.

c. Take the necessary measures to ensure our full participation as First Peoples
and Indigenous Peoples in formulating, implementing, and monitoring miti-
gation and adaptation activities relating to the impacts of the climate crisis.

d. Streamline and improve the often long and burdensome process of accessing
the technical and financial resources urgently needed by communities
of First Peoples and Indigenous Peoples in adapting to the impacts of the
climate crisis.
3.2 We call upon State Governments to:
   a. Respect, uphold, and protect our rights as Indigneous Peoples as well as the rights we hold as individual members of society, including, but not limited to, the rights of women; rights of the child; rights of persons living with disabilities; economic, social and cultural rights; and civil and political rights.
   
b. Uphold their responsibility to protect the rights of climate-displaced peoples within their jurisdictions.
   
c. Develop and formulate rights-centered laws, policies, and strategies that address the spectrum of risks associated with climate displacement, including our right to remain and build protections in place.
   
d. Actively engage our communities in decision-making processes, particularly as they relate to adaptation and relocation.

3.3 We call upon our friends, supporters, and partners in our states, regions, and around the world to:
   a. Continue supporting our efforts to advocate for our rights as First Peoples and Indigenous Peoples who are the first and most severely affected by the impacts of the climate crisis.
   
b. Support our goal of empowering our communities, especially our youth, in understanding their rights and the impacts of the climate crisis.
   
c. Support our community leaders to create spaces and innovative ways that allow for the transfer of knowledge, both traditional and modern, to our children.
   
d. Support our desire to establish a network among our communities of First Peoples and Indigenous Peoples affected by the climate crisis to share, learn, and help one another to increase our chances of successful implementation of adaptation strategies that are based on proven shared lessons.

3.4 We call upon our leaders to:
   a. Support initiatives to enhance the knowledge and understanding of the communities of their human rights, the climate crisis, and strategies to adapt to these impacts.
   
b. Commit to supporting the creation of spaces and the implementation of initiatives that protect, revive, and transfer the rapidly eroding traditional knowledge and ways of life of First Peoples and Indigenous Peoples to younger generations, which is imperative for building community resilience to the impacts of the climate crisis.
   
c. Commit to further building the resilience of our frontline communities who are at risk from climate-forced displacement.
d. Commit to improving communications among all rights holders and supporting a community participatory process that increases community awareness and input on adaptation strategies.

3.5 We invite our youth to:

a. Continue to be proactively engaged in adaptation strategies, planning, and implementation.

b. Work closely with their Elders to learn and practice their traditional ways of living that are important for their identity as First Peoples and Indigenous Peoples.

3.6 We, the Participants of the First Peoples’ Convening on Climate Forced Displacement:

a. Commit to remain connected as First Peoples and Indigenous Peoples that are affected by the climate crisis with the goal of accelerating our progress toward realizing our adaptation strategies.

b. Agree to form the necessary working groups that will help to connect our communities through information sharing, learning exchanges, and uniting voices.

c. Express sincere appreciation to our friends and supporters for their commitment, vision, and support in making this convening a reality.

Agreed by First Peoples and Indigenous Peoples of the First Peoples’ Convening on Climate-Forced Displacement, October 1-4, 2018, Girdwood, Alaska.
NOTES

4 Patricia Cochrane, Keynote Address at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
6 Curt D. Storiuzi et al., “Most Atolls will be Uninhabitable by the mid-21st Century because of Sea-Level Rise Exacerbating Wave-Driven Flooding,” Science Advances, 4, 4, April 25, 2018, http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/4/4/eaap9741
8 Notes of First Peoples’ Convening, October 3, 2018.
9 Kathryn Norton-Smith et al., Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples: A Synthesis of Current Impacts and Experiences (US Department of Agriculture, October 2016), 2.
11 Interview with John Pinggayaq, October 3, 2018.
12 Chevak community presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
13 Elim community presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
14 Atmautulak community presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
15 Chevak presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
16 Unalakleet community presentation at First Peoples People Convening, October 2, 2018.
17 Port Heiden community presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
18 Atmautulak community presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
19 Eyak community presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
20 Kotlik community presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
21 Adelaine Ahmasuk presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
22 Elim community presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
23 Eunice Brown, Unalakleet community presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
24 Nelson Lagoon community presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
25 Nunapitchuk community presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
26 Atmautulak community presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
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30 Shahjahan presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
31 Louisiana presentation, First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
32 Tuvalu presentation, First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
34 Makereta Waqavonovono presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
35 Ibid.
36 Solomon Islands presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
37 Palau presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
38 Interview with Mark Stege, October 3, 2018.
39 Interview with David Taniweke Boseto, October 3, 2018.
40 Solomon Islands presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
44 Video presented by Tukuraki Village, First Peoples Convening, October 2, 2018
45 Chevak presentation, First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
46 Golovin presentation, First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
47 Kwigillingok presentation, First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
48 Nunapitchuk presentation, First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
49 Kwigillingok community presentation, First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
50 Interview with Adelaine Ahmasuk, October 3, 2018.
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51 Pamela Smith, Eyak presentation at First Peoples Convening, October 2, 2018.
52 Eliz community presentation, First Peoples Convening, October 2, 2018.
53 Nelson Lagoon community presentation, First Peoples Convening, October 2, 2018.
54 Interview with Makere Waqaswano, October 3, 2018.
55 Interview with Tanya Eison, October 4, 2018.
56 Matina Vallopa, Tuvalu presentation at First Peoples Convening, October 2, 2018.
57 Kiribati presentation at First Peoples Convening, October 2, 2018.
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59 Kwilgillngok presentation, First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
62 UN Climate Change, Decision -/CP.24 [Advance Unedited Version]. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cp24_aunv.5b57a9920LCFP_rev.pdf
65 The Platform on Disaster Displacement is currently the major international venue for such rights-based planning, but it neither includes representatives of all impacted nations, nor does it adequately engage leaders from impacted communities. For a brief overview of international forums and how they address rights issues, see Alex Randall, “Fixing Climate-Induced Displacement: Are the Climate Talks Enough?,” Climate Migration, December 14, 2016, http://climatemigration.org.uk/fixing-climate-linked-displacement-climate-talks-enough/.
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68 ibid., 7.
71 Notes of the Newtok working group at First Peoples’ Convening, October 3, 2018.
74 Interview with Mark Stege at First Peoples’ Convening, October 3, 2018.
75 Patricia Cochran, Keynote Address at First People’s Convening, October 2, 2018.
76 Norton-Smyth et al., Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples, 16.
77 Notes from Traditional Knowledge Working Group at First Peoples’ Convening, October 3, 2018.
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80 Shahjahan, Climate Displacement in Bangladesh.
81 Fenton Lutunataba, presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
82 Wayne Andrew, presentation at First Peoples’ Convening, October 2, 2018.
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p. 7: Opening Ceremony images: Top – Peleisne Alofa speaking with Makereta Waqavonovono; Alaska Native snow boots. Middle – Sevusevu ceremony by Simione Deruru; Fijian mat presented by Peleisne Alofa; Wayne Andrew presenting gift from Palau, Makereta Waqavonovono presenting gift to Dr. John Pingayaq. Bottom – Mark Stege offering gift from Marshall Islands to Aaron Leggett, President of the Native Village of Eklutna; John Pingayaq speaking with Aaron Leggett.

p. 9: Dr. John Pingayaq offering opening prayer; Denise Pollock of AJ; Remainder – members of the Kimigikmiut Dancers & Singers of Anchorage.

p. 11: Alyeska Resort; First Peoples Convening banner; participant nametags

p. 12: First Peoples Convening working group; Pacific working group

p. 14: John Henry; Adelaine Ahmasuk; Paul Nagaruk

p. 15: Top – Pamela Smith, Kristina Peterson, and Danielle Fuller-Wimbush; members of the Declaration Team. Bottom – relocation working group; working group.

p. 16: Top – Dr. John Pingayaq leading a working group; Kristina Peterson and Rosina Philippe. Middle – David Boseto, Simione Deruru, and Kalivati Rodaro; working group. Bottom – presentation by Special Rapporteur Cecelia Jimenez-Damary; Denise Pollock asking question of Special Rapporteur Jimenez-Damary.

p. 20: Clockwise – First Peoples Convening participants; identifying communities on the map; Stanley Tom

p. 24: Rosina Philippe

p. 25: First Peoples Convening delegations from the Pacific

p. 27: Rine Uerara and Peleisne Alofa; Malaeleupe Samifua; Jacinta Helin Hanks

p. 31: Clockwise – exposed coconut roots, Solomon Islands; coastal erosion, Papua New Guinea; mangroves, Kiribati; land loss in Louisiana 1932-2011.

p. 36: Patricia Cochran, Robin Bronen, and Lewis Amik III; Adelaine Ahmasuk and Syma Mirza

p. 37: Della Hendrickson, Chief Albert Naquin; First Peoples Convening participants greeting

p. 44: Clockwise – John Henry; Wayne Andrew; Chief Albert Naquin; First Peoples Convening healing circle; Dr. John Pingayaq teaching a traditional dance

p. 48: First Peoples Convening participants