

Indigenous Leaders' Vision for the Arctic Permanent Participants Side event at the Arctic Frontiers 2020

Clarion Edge Hotel, Room Importkompaniet
18:15-19:15, January 28, 2020

Summary

The Arctic Council Indigenous Peoples Secretariat and the Arctic Council's Permanent Participants organized a Side Event during the Arctic Frontiers to discuss the 6th Arctic Leaders' Summit, a high level Indigenous political gathering which took place in November 2019. The panelists from each Permanent Participants (PP) organization shared their vision for the future of the Arctic and addressed the following questions:

What is your vision for the Arctic? How would you see this call for action be implemented?



Christina Henriksen, Vice President of the Saami Council, introduced the panel, and Gunn-Britt Retter, Head of the Arctic and Environment for the Saami Council, moderated the panel. Panelists included:

- Liza Mack, Aleut International Association, Executive Director
- Chief Gary Harrison, Arctic Athabaskan Council, Head of Delegation
- Evon Peter, Gwich'in Council International, Board Member
- James Stotts, Inuit Circumpolar Council, ICC Alaska Vice President
- Yury Khatanzevskiy, Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Head of Delegation
- Ellen Inga Turi, The Saami Council, Head of Delegation
- Piera Heaika Muotka, Saami Youth

Arctic Leaders' Summit Summary

The Arctic Leaders' Summit (ALS) is a unique, longstanding forum in which Indigenous Peoples from across the Arctic set their own priorities for discussion, bridge differences, and create a common understanding, particularly on matters related to the Arctic environment. In addition to the PPs, other prominent Arctic Indigenous leaders, the Arctic States and Observers to the Arctic Council, are invited.

The PPs have organized five ALS since 1991 in Denmark, Norway, Russia, and Canada. In 2019, the Saami Council hosted ALS6 and the first Arctic Youth Leaders' Summit in Rovaniemi, Finland. Approximately 70 delegates attended the ALS6 to discuss past, present, and future cooperation. A declaration was created that spoke of the Indigenous leaders' shared vision for the Arctic. Prior to the Arctic Leaders' Summit, the first-ever Youth Leader Summit was held, gathering approximately 30 youth. A declaration was created, which helped shape the agenda for the ALS. The ALS6 and Youth Summit declarations are included together under [ALS6 Declaration](#).

Vision for the Future of the Arctic

The visions shared by the Indigenous leaders in the panel aligned with the Arctic Leader declaration and the Arctic Youth leader declaration. The panel identified common themes in the visions of the PPs. The most frequently discussed were:

Importance of Language Preservation and Revitalization:

The leaders want Indigenous languages to be revitalized with more Indigenous peoples learning and speaking their native language daily and passing it down to future generations. They would like to see the governments and schools support this vision and work with Indigenous leaders to develop a curriculum that preserves Indigenous cultural identity and knowledge. The goal is for people to speak and think strategically in their Indigenous language.

Preservation of Cultural Identity and Knowledge

Indigenous leaders expressed that traditional knowledge must be protected, and Indigenous literature, music, art, and stories must be preserved. The leaders want to include Indigenous knowledge when looking at climate change and biodiversity, as it has traditionally been neglected by government and policy, which has resulted in negative consequences for Indigenous peoples and their lands.

Improvements in Mental and Physical Health

The leaders want to see physically and mentally healthy communities. Support must be provided for those who have suffered due to culture shock and colonization. They would like to see a future where there is a decrease in suicide rates among Indigenous peoples.

Ensuring both environmental and economic stability for generations to come

The panel wants the traditional way of life to be protected. In addition to healthy people, there must be healthy animals, land, and water. They would like to see more clean energy and see non-indigenous people respect the lands and people. The leaders would like to see sustainable development and economic security for Indigenous peoples.

Involvement of Youth as they are our present and our future

The leaders want to see the youth strong and healthy and include them at every level of discussions regarding the present and future: there is an emphasis placed on youth as the current and future leaders. Many young Indigenous want to stay in their homeland and work for the benefit of their people.

Having a valued and respected voice in matters in which affect the Arctic and Indigenous peoples

The panel would like to see more discussion with governments regarding policy and decisions that impact Indigenous peoples and their lands. The leaders are against such development that does not have prior negotiation and approval. They also would like to see international support and collaboration on issues such as climate control and environmental protection. All themes link together to having healthy and secure Indigenous peoples who know where they come from with their culture maintained for generations to come.

Call for Action

Leaders expressed the importance of continuing the work they are doing in the international arena. Many PPs have members in different countries, with various levels of resources and relationships with their governments. PPs are looking at their groups and countries to determine how to proceed with their agendas and their united visions strategically. Leaders expressed the importance of having a united front on the issues in which there are agreements amongst the indigenous groups. They also called for others in the room to stand with them and invest in bringing their vision forward. Everyone has a part to play in bringing forth a sustainable future.

All agreed that strategic thinking is key. When new infrastructure is needed, it is essential to look at the long-term environmental impacts and not just the short-term costs. An example of this is when installing running water in remote communities. Many leaders mentioned the UN Decade of Indigenous languages beginning in 2022 as a

positive sign of support and are hopeful in what is to come. The schools must work with Indigenous leaders to develop their curriculums to educate the youth best.

The leaders recognize that the declarations created at the ALS are living documents, and they will continue to evolve and grow. Youth are the present and the future, and their involvement in decision making and having a voice is vital. Youth are always changing, and it is crucial to have the input of youth. Leaders would like to see youth to be invited to attend meetings and be part of delegations. They would also like to see more funding to support youth involvement. It is the best way for youth to build knowledge and capacity and best prepare future leaders.

Specific actions identified by groups in the sessions focused on preparing to adapt to the rapidly changing environment. The ICC focuses on adapting to the changes in our environment and mitigating the impacts on their people and lands. The Saami Council mentioned plans to protect further and revitalize Indigenous languages. They will be using venues such as the Arctic Council and others to make this happen. They have both short term and long-term projects underway and hope for support and cooperation from people outside of their organization to make this happen.

AIA talked about the importance of bringing the message home to their communities and show that things are being done. Also, the need to show that they are addressing these issues at an international level. AAC would like to educate Indigenous and non-indigenous people on decolonization and how to get along with others. There are too many cases in this world where people mistreat each other. There is a call for the education of all parties and to treat each other well.

Conclusion

Despite a rapidly changing Arctic environment, Indigenous Leaders remain optimistic about the progress being made. There are many similarities in the visions of the six PP organizations, but paths may vary on how they see their visions implemented. They are united by the declarations, passion for youth involvement, and desire to protect their peoples, wildlife, lands, and waters.

There are few Indigenous peoples in the circumpolar north, and as a result, they need those who believe in this vision to be supportive and invest in their vision. The Indigenous leaders know that there will be things beyond their power and control, such as climate change; therefore, they call for international cooperation and collaboration to protect the planet we live in.