UN Environmental Programme

Arctic Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples

CLARKMUN XIV

Clark University Model United Nations

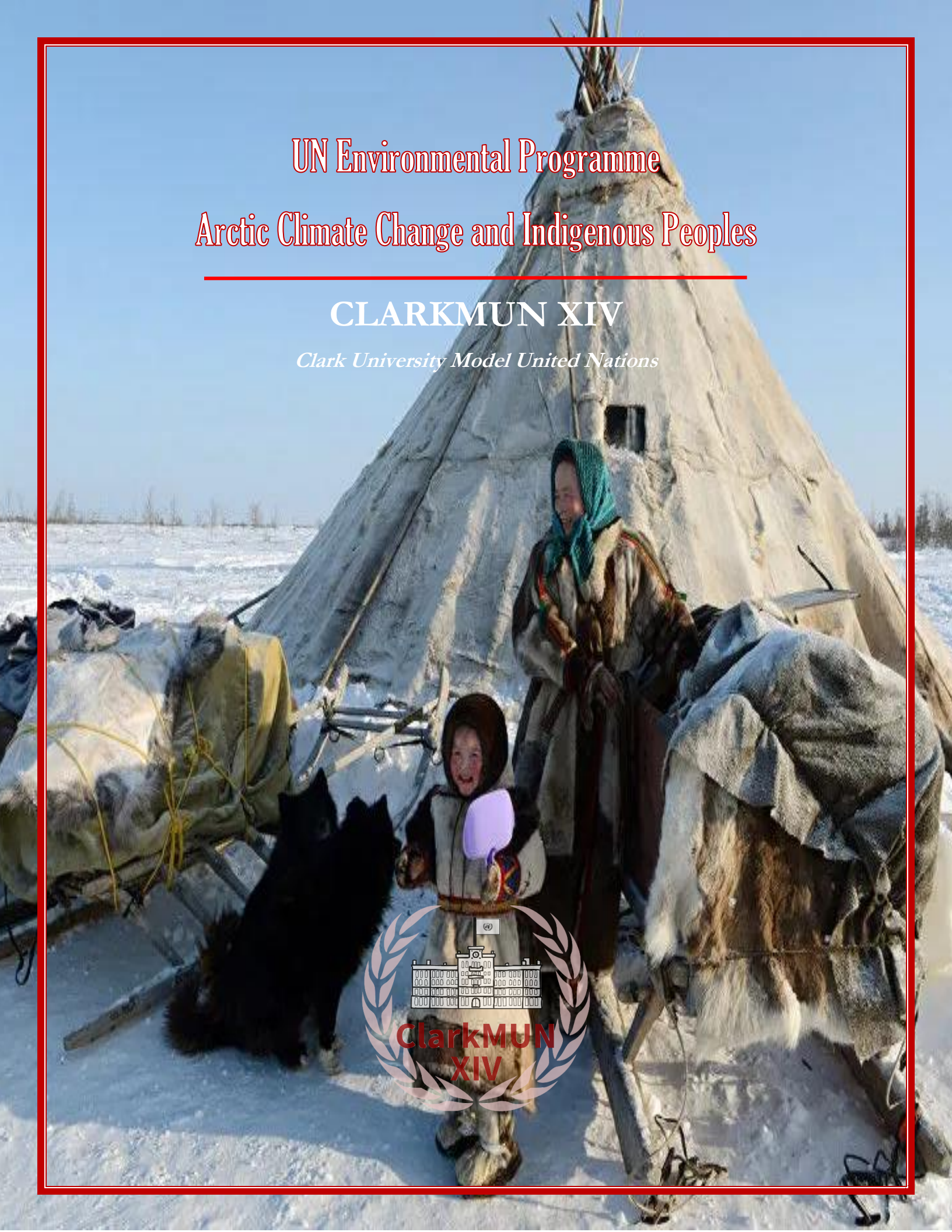

Table of Contents

Chair Letter

Hello delegates,

Welcome to ClarkMUN XIV! My name is Cayetana Rodriguez and I am the chair for this year's UNEP committee. It is my pleasure to present this background guide to you and dive together into the topic of climate change and Arctic Indigenous Peoples. Alongside the Secretariat, we are so excited that you are a part of this year's conference.

Model UN has been an important part of my life for the past 6 years. During high school, I had the honor to be my school's Head Delegate and Secretary-General for our annual conference. At Clark, I joined Clark's MUN travel team. Additionally, I also work for the International Model United Nations Association (IMUNA), which organizes NHSMUN, the world's largest Model UN conference for high school students. Model UN has not only allowed me to improve public speaking, research, and leadership skills, but I have been fortunate to meet amazing delegates from all around the world.

A little bit about myself: I am currently a junior at Clark University studying Management and Political Science. I am from Lima, Peru. On-campus, I work as an Admissions Ambassador, Residential Life Office Assistant, and Resident Adviser. During my free time, I enjoy listening to Broadway soundtracks, dancing, and reading.

Climate change is an urgent problem. In this case, we will specifically be concentrating in Arctic Indigenous communities. The increase of thawing permafrost, coastal erosion and sea ice loss places Arctic Indigenous communities at a high risk of their land and cultures being affected by climate change. This makes Arctic Indigenous peoples vulnerable to climate migration or displacement. My goal with this committee is for delegates to create sustainable solutions that include Indigenous communities, private actors, and public agencies. I would like to see ideas that integrate traditional knowledge and respect Indigenous land, cultural, and political rights.

I hope you enjoy this background guide. Please, do not hesitate to reach out to me at crodriguezpolar@clarku.edu if you have any questions. Good luck!

Sincerely,

Cayetana Rodriguez

Introduction

Climate change is one of the most urgent emergencies that the globe faces today. As defined by NASA, climate change is a long-term change in the average weather patterns that have defined the Earth's local, regional and global climates.[1] We are currently living in a period known as the Anthropocene, which refers to the human impact on causing global warming.[2] In the past 60 years, the human impact has increased carbon dioxide emissions, ocean acidification, habitat destruction, and resource extraction.[3] There is still a debate if this is an actual term that should be accepted, but the fact that humans have potentiated global warming still holds true. Nevertheless, there is a region on the Earth that is worse off due to climate change.

The Arctic has warmed three times faster than the global average.[4] It is estimated that the Arctic will experience an increase of 3-6ºC in temperature before 2080.[5] This impacts local ecosystems and contributes to rising sea levels and provokes extreme temperatures.[6] The Arctic Amplification affects all regions of the world. The Arctic acts as the world's refrigerator. The Arctic is covered in ice and snow, which reflects solar light back to space. With rising temperatures, snow and ice melts, resulting in a decrease in reflectivity (also known as albedo). Due to the melting of ice and glaciers, sea levels have risen. This has caused coastal erosion, floods, and storms, damaging coastal communities. With climate change increasing, permafrost melts. Permafrost (frozen layer of soil) stores large amounts of methane and carbon. When permafrost thaws, methane is released. If more methane is released, global warming is potentiated.[7]

The Arctic has also been home for Indigenous peoples for thousands of years. For them, Arctic climate change is impacting environmental, economic, and societal aspects of the communities. Arctic Indigenous communities have already started to suffer the impact of climate change, which demonstrates the urgent need for climate action and resilience.[8] Despite the challenges, Arctic climate change also offers potential for sustainable economic development and climate action that includes traditional Indigenous knowledge.

With that being said, this background guide will explore in depth the impact of global warming in Arctic Indigenous communities. Challenges, climate migration, traditional knowledge and past actions will be discussed in order to boost innovation for sustainable solutions.

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[1] "What is Climate Change?", NASA, accessed January 1, 2024, https://climate.nasa.gov/what-is-climate-change/.
[2] Katie Pavid, "What is the Anthropocene and why does it matter?", Natural History Museum, accessed January 1, 2024, https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/what-is-the-anthropocene.html.
[3] Pavid, "What is the Anthropocene and why does it matter?".
[4] "Climate change in the Arctic," Norsk Polar Institutt, accessed January 1, 2024, https://www.npolar.no/en/themes/climate-change-in-the-arctic/.
[5] Norsk Polar Institutt, "Climate Change in the Arctic".
[6] "The Arctic in a Changing Climate," Arctic Council, accessed January 2, 2024, https://arctic-council.org/explore/topics/climate/.
[7] "Six Ways loss of Arctic Ice impacts everyone," WWF, accessed January 2, 2024, https://www.worldwildlife.org/pages/six-ways-loss-of-arctic-ice-impacts-everyone.
[8] "Arctic Peoples," Arctic Council, accessed January 2, 2024, https://arctic-council.org/explore/topics/arctic-peoples/.

Role of Committee

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was founded as a result of growing recognition of the need for international cooperation on environmental issues. UNEP was founded in 1972 following the UN Conference on the Human Environment, with the goal of "monitoring the state of the environment, informing policy making with science and coordinating responses to the world's environmental challenges".[9] For more than 50 years, UNEP has worked with governments, civil society, private sector, and UN entities to address environmental matters. UNEP possesses 193 Member States. UNEP has achieved large accomplishments such as the creation of multilateral environmental agreements and provides Secretariats to monitor these agreements. Other achievements include: launching the World Conservation Strategy and the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, and leading the Paris Agreement.[10]

Image of UNEP in session. This picture was taken in Nairobi, Kenya, on the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the UN Environment Programme.

UNEP will be focusing on addressing the urgent challenges faced by Arctic Indigenous peoples. This committee will foster collaborative and diplomatic debate while exploring the multifaceted issues of climate change and Arctic Indigenous peoples. This committee's mission is to discuss sustainable practices, Indigenous political representation, housing and infrastructure policies, economic diversification, and resource extraction management, all while integrating Indigenous traditional knowledge and practices. By researching into the intricate intersections of climate change, cultural resilience, and sustainable development, the committee seeks to develop informed policies and actionable strategies. Emphasizing

[9] "UNEP: 50 years of Environmental Milestones," UNEP, accessed January 2, 2024, https://www.unep.org/environmental-moments-unep50-timeline.
[10] UNEP, "UNEP: 50 years of Environmental Milestones."

international cooperation, the committee endeavors to integrate the perspectives and needs of Arctic Indigenous communities into global climate change responses.

Through rigorous, fruitful, and diplomatic debate, UNEP will act as a catalyst for positive action and ideas on mitigating global warming's impact on Arctic Indigenous communities. The vision of this committee is proposing solutions that balance both sustainable practices and cultural preservation of Arctic Indigenous peoples.

Historical Background

Indigenous Peoples have inhabited the Arctic for thousands of years. These populations include the Saami in Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Northwest Russia, Chukchi and Nenets in Russia, Inuit in Canada[11], etc. As previously mentioned, Arctic areas are inhabited by four million people between 8 countries: Canada, US, Russia, Finland, Norway, Iceland and Denmark.

During the 1950s, a rapid growth of Arctic inhabitants occurred because of improved healthcare and natural resources accessibility, which led to an increased flux of immigrants. Since then, Arctic Indigenous communities tend to live in widely scattered areas.[12] There has also been a history of colonization of Arctic Indigenous communities. The colonization of Inuit Nunaat by Westphalian States like Canada, United States and Russia, caused cultural assimilation, land dispossession, and disarticulation of livelihoods.

In the turn of the 20th century, the presence of gold in Alaska attracted individuals looking to initiate extractive and mining industries. In different parts of Inuit Nunaat, different agreements took place to define borders and seize economic opportunities. These also involved countries such as the United States to define property rights, dispute settlements, and define which citizens were entitled to the exploitation of gold mining. The discovery and mining of gold, alongside an influx of foreigners and enterprises, intensified racial divisions within Inuit Nunaat.[13]

Due to the past colonial background in the Arctic, Indigenous peoples are even more vulnerable to local governments, enterprises, and extractive industries. Thus, institutions such as the Arctic Council play an important role on promoting Indigenous land, cultural, economic, social, and environmental rights. The Arctic Council is the leading intergovernmental forum among the Arctic states. It mainly discusses environmental issues and the protection of Indigenous Peoples and Arctic inhabitants.[14] In 1991, the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy was signed between the 8 Arctic state members and Indigenous peoples organizations such as the Inuit, Saami and Russian Indigenous groups. This treaty also made 3 Indigenous organizations as the first permanent members of the Arctic Council, which included the Inuit Circumpolar Council, the Saami Council and the

[11] "Arctic Indigenous Peoples," University of Lapland, accessed January 2, 2024, https://www.arcticcentre.org/EN/arcticregion/Arctic-Indigenous-Peoples.
[12] University of Lapland, "Arctic Indigenous Peoples."
[13] Pedro Allemand Mancebo Silva, "The Old Colonialisms and the New Ones: The Arctic Resource Boom as a New Wave of Settler-Colonialism," The Arctic Institute, last modified October 25, 2022, https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/old-colonialisms-new-ones-arctic-resource-boom-new-wave-settler-colonialism/.
[14] "History of the Arctic Council," Arctic Council, accessed January 4, 2024, https://arctic-council.org/about/timeline.

Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North. Throughout the years, the Arctic Council has developed strategies and initiatives pertaining to the Arctic flora and fauna, marine life, wildlife, and establishing an Indigenous peoples secretariat. Additionally, it founded a Sustainable Development Working Group focused on enhancing the culture, economy, environment and more of Arctic Indigenous communities. In 1998, UNEP was featured as an observer, alongside the Northern Forum and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).[15]

It is of extreme importance to understand that there are channels for Indigenous peoples to voice their opinions on climate change. Nevertheless, with multiple interests encountered, such as those from governments and extractive industries, Indigenous Peoples suffer at a high rate the consequences of Arctic climate change.

Topic of Committee

The Arctic has been home for multiple Indigenous communities over the span of thousands of years. Approximately, 10% of the Arctic's four million inhabitants identify as Indigenous.[16] Indigenous peoples are disproportionately more vulnerable to climate change, as they generally live in remote regions and maintain links with the environment for their own subsistence.[17] Thus, Indigenous peoples in the Arctic are not indifferent to climate change.[18] Indigenous peoples all over the Arctic have relied on hunting whales, fish, seals, and large mammals to feed their families.

Sea ice is frozen seawater that floats on the ocean surface. It retreats over the summer months, but does not completely disappear. Sea ice is extremely relevant to the polar environment, and influences ocean circulation, weather and climate.[19] Sea ice is important for Indigenous peoples' lives, enabling them a space to travel to and from other communities. However, due to climate change, more sea ice is being lost, creating risks for local communities and restricting travel. For example, as Lisa Koperqualuk, the ICC Canada Vice President, mentioned, "our livelihoods remain closely tied to the sea ice. Our people travel on the sea ice to support their families and community with locally harvested fresh foods that are essential to our health and our culture". Climate change also impacts Indigenous livelihood, culture and tradition.

[15] Arctic Council, "History of the Arctic Council."
[16] Shaugn Coggins and James D. Ford, et al, "Indigenous Peoples and Climate Justice in the Arctic," Georgetown University Journal of International Affairs," last modified February 23, 2021, https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2021/02/23/indigenous-peoples-and-climate-justice-in-the-arctic/.
[17] Coggins and Ford, et al, "Indigenous Peoples and Climate Justice in the Arctic."
[18] "The Arctic's Indigenous Communities under Threat," WWF, accessed January 4, 2024. https://www.arcticwwf.org/newsroom/features/arctic-connected-the-arctics-indigenous-communities-under-threat/.
[19] "Disappearing Sea Ice, Changing Diet," Arctic Council, accessed January 4, 2024, https://arctic-council.org/explore/topics/arctic-peoples/our-changing-home/sea-ice/.

Image of a house that fell off the edge of the land in 2006 in the Shishmaref Community, Alaska. Photo provided by CNN.

There are different approaches to the issue of climate change and Arctic Indigenous communities. The following were proposed by the Georgetown University Journal of International Affairs:[20] distributional justice, capabilities approach, recognition and procedural justice are some of the approaches in mitigating this issue. Distributional justice refers to the distribution of climate change impacts, and the distributions of adoption. It is recognizing that Indigenous peoples are disproportionately more affected by climate change despite being the less contributors to the problem. Capabilities approach is including solutions that take into account the access to land, traditional foods and cultural activities for Indigenous communities. Recognition refers to recognizing socioeconomic inequality, marginalization, oppression, land dispossession, and colonial histories when mitigating climate change in Arctic native communities. Lastly, procedural justice is the ability to participate equally in institutional and decision-making processes.[21]

Many of the impacts of climate change threaten the rights of Indigenous Peoples, such as their traditional lands, territories, and resources. For example, coastal erosion and thawing permafrost are already destroying culturally significant sites, such as the Ipiutak cemetery in Alaska. Climate change is also affecting wildlife by impeding safe travel and land access. Indigenous Peoples are undergoing socioeconomic stress, marginalization, climate-induced migration, and land dispossession in the context of Arctic climate change.[22]

[20] Coggins and Ford, et al, "Indigenous Peoples and Climate Justice in the Arctic."
[21] Coggins and Ford, et al, "Indigenous Peoples and Climate Justice in the Arctic."
[22] Coggins and Ford, et al, "Indigenous Peoples and Climate Justice in the Arctic."

Current Situation

With sea ice loss, coastal erosion, and thawing permafrost, coastal communities have been severely affected by climate change. Many of these communities are considered "removed from the road system" and accessing them is only possible through boat or plane. Arctic Indigenous Peoples are strongly linked to their environment and surroundings. Relocating is an option, but it involves difficult challenges. Around 60-80% of Indigenous communities depend on their surroundings and wildlife for food. For example, in Alaska, 65% of the land is own by the United States government, making federal policies relevant to this issue. It is also worth mentioning that earlier on December 2022, President Joe Biden provided 75 million USD to help Indigenous peoples relocate to higher ground.[23]

Extractive industries play an important role in potentiating climate change and displacement in the Arctic. These practices can increase carbon footprint, damage ecosystems, and destroy wildlife (essential for Indigenous communities' subsistence). Recently, Norway approved a project to open the Arctic Ocean for seabed mineral exploration despite warnings from international actors and environmentalists.[24] The decision consists of the extraction of crucial minerals for electric batteries, wind turbines, and other renewable technologies, as these are abundant in the Norwegian Arctic seabed. As previously mentioned, the project has received enormous backlash. For example, Karoline Andaur, chief executive of WWF Norway, has stated that this is the "biggest disgrace in Norway's management of the oceans in modern times."[25] This extractive project will severely impact wildlife and ecosystems, which are essential for Indigenous livelihood, practices, and subsistence overall.

Climate change is displacing Indigenous peoples from their lands. For example, in 2004, a storm destroyed 21 feet of coastline overnight. Since then, other events such as the cyclones of 2011 and 2014 have kept on destroying the land. These phenomena affected Kivalina, one of the 31 Alaskan villages that are extremely threatened by climate change and are considering relocation. Indigenous peoples unfortunately possess a history of being disproportionately affected by climate change and governmental action. In 2006, a judge found that the Red Dog Mine violated the Clean Water Act in 600 occasions. The mine agreed to pay 8 million USD in damages but continues to pollute water until this day.[26] This is very alarming and it shows that enterprises are benefiting their economic gains over the

[23] Julie Depenbrock, "This is what's at risk from climate change in Alaska," *NPR*, December 22, 2022, https://www.npr.org/2022/12/22/1144942195/climate-change-is-transforming-the-arctic-and-alaska-natives-are-on-the-frontlin.
[24] "Deep-sea mining in the Arctic Ocean gets the green light from Norwegian lawmakers," AP, accessed January 4, 2024, https://apnews.com/article/norway-underwater-mining-arctic-663c7fceba5fc41e84affc5f84d52504.
[25] "Norway Faces Backlash as its Backs Deep-Sea Mining in the Arctic," Life in Norway, accessed January 4, 2024, https://www.lifeinnorway.net/norway-backs-deep-sea-mining-in-arctic/.
[26] Sonia Luokkala, "Climate Change Is Driving Residents of Kivalina From Their Homes," Sierra, last modified November 12, 2017, https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/climate-change-driving-residents-kivalina-their-homes.

health, livelihood, and survival of Arctic Indigenous communities and other local populations.

On another note, Indigenous peoples and representatives were heavily involved at the Conference of Parties of the UNFCCC (28th Edition) this past November. The Inuit developed recommendations and frameworks during this important climate conference. The Inuit Council composed the following recommendations on how to tackle climate change and Indigenous peoples[27]:

- Recognize that Inuit and other Indigenous peoples hold a distinct status, and that all climate change work must be based on a strong human rights foundation
- Ensure that all research and decision-making that impacts Inuit and Inuit Nunaat, includes the equitable and ethical engagement of Inuit and the utilization of Indigenous Knowledge
- Actions to combat climate change must not infringe on our distinct rights, including the right to self-determination
- Create direct pathways for Indigenous Peoples to access equitable climate finance, including the Loss and Damage Fund
- Governments must recognize the link between climate change and other environmental threats and support the advocacy of Indigenous peoples in other global practices

Protecting Indigenous peoples from climate change impact is a joint effort of private, public, environmental, international, and Indigenous actors. With private sustainable practices, accountability methods, increasing policies and funding for Indigenous climate action, and reliable access to climate finance, are some of the ways of successfully tackling this issue. We are excited to learn about all of your proposals and tackle this issue in a holistic, respectful way for Indigenous groups who are disproportionately vulnerable and affected by climate change and extreme weather events.

[27] Mirjana Binggeli, "Inuit recommendations to COP28," Polar Journal, last modified December 7, 2023, https://polarjournal.ch/en/2023/12/07/inuit-recommendations-to-cop28/.

Bloc Positions

- Countries who belong to the Arctic Member States: This category encompasses the 8 Arctic countries which include: United States, Canada, Russia, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, and Sweden. These countries have a historical background on Indigenous matters in the Arctic region, as well as a voting place on the Arctic Council. It is extremely important for other countries to work with the 8 Arctic members to mitigate climate change impact on Indigenous Peoples. This group of countries should be focused on developing policies, public-private partnerships, and promoting Indigenous cultural, land, economic, social, and environmental rights.

- Countries with large Indigenous Populations rate and a high climate vulnerability risk: While some countries are not necessarily located in the Arctic, they possess a vast knowledge on Indigenous policies, politics, and law. Countries such as Peru, Bolivia, China, New Zealand, and many more can provide their expertise on Indigenous matter to establish more partnerships between native communities and local governments. It would also be relevant to discuss climate finance and access to climate donations/funds to mitigate global warming in the Arctic.

- Countries with medium to low Indigenous Populations rate and a high climate vulnerability risk: Some countries do not possess large Indigenous populations rates compared to others. Nevertheless, there is still a background in these matters that might be beneficial to committee. For these types of countries, it is recommended looking into detail what the country has implemented for the medium or small-sized Indigenous group. Additionally, it will also be important to evaluate the current climate change situation of those countries. Given current scenarios, can these countries provide climate efforts programming and strategies? Can these be implemented to the Arctic?

Questions to Consider and Issues to be Addressed

1. How can Indigenous rights be protected in the Arctic? How can Indigenous communities get involved in decision-making processes and political bodies such as the Arctic Council?

2. How can climate efforts also support the preservation of the unique cultural practices and traditions of Arctic Indigenous communities?

3. How can we mitigate the impact of climate change on Indigenous infrastructure and housing, especially facing constant climate changing conditions?

4. How can resource management practices can be adapted to ensure sustainable practices for the use of Arctic natural resources? Is there a way that Indigenous traditional knowledge can be integrated into resource management?

5. Can public-private partnerships be accomplished, while integrating Indigenous representation? How can we hold businesses accountable for the environmental, social and governance practices? How can we assure that their sustainability reports are true?

6. How can economic diversification be promoted in Arctic Indigenous communities to reduce dependence on climate-sensible activities?

Suggestions for Further Research

Thank you delegate for reading this background guide. We hope that you have learned about Arctic Indigenous peoples and climate change. While reading this background guide is a great start, we encourage you to continue your research on the topic. We suggest looking at official websites on climate change, the Arctic, and climate action organizations, such as the following:

- UNEP's Official Website, or other UN sponsored websites
- Arctic Council's Official Website
- UNFCCC's Official Website
- COP's Official Website
- Climate Adaptation Knowledge Exchange
- Green Climate Fund
- Saami Council Net
- Trusted media publications (such as InsideClimate News)
- MIT Climate Portal
- International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs
- Trusted NGO websites

Additionally, we highly encourage you to not only focus on climate change as a whole. We want specific and innovative solutions that involve Arctic Indigenous peoples. Some of these proposals can include: access to climate finance, political groups, tackling climate-induced migration, urban and infrastructure, and those that include traditional knowledge.

You can ask any questions at crodriguezpolar@clarku.edu related to research, proposals, and more. Looking forward to it and see you at ClarkMUN XIV!

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