



The survival of the human species depends on achieving the [Sustainable Development Goals](#). That was the message given by the representative of UN Environment at a side event titled *Climate-Induced Displacement* held at the [16th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues](#).

The world is experiencing a climate crisis. There has been growing consensus on climate change since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit but the need for action has become critical. Indigenous peoples are on the frontlines of climate change. They experience its effects in acute ways not yet felt by other citizens of the planet.

The people of [Tuvalu](#), a cluster of islands in the Pacific, are confronting the challenge of loss of land due to regular flooding, land erosion, and cyclones. Since 2000, four of their islands have disappeared in rising seawaters. They experience food insecurity as their marine-based diet is compromised by polluted seawater and the land used for cultivation becomes increasingly salinized. Internal and external displacement have become common despite efforts to mitigate the loss of land. Now the people are not only fighting to protect their land but also to achieve basic legal rights for those who are displaced.

On the other side of ocean, in Alaska, indigenous communities have also been disrupted and relocated due to rising sea levels. The burden of relocation has been placed on the shoulders of the indigenous peoples. They experience loss of culture, language, communal narrative, and a fractured sense of identity. Identity is tied to their traditional land and they question who they are without it. They also experience food insecurity and greater incidence of preventable diseases because of the loss of their traditional lifestyle.

The Sámi, an Arctic people, grapple with the effects of climate change and loss of land as a result of companies moving into renewable energy. Because renewable sources of energy, such as wind power, require vast tracts of land, often the required size of land is only found on indigenous territories. The Sámi are consequently engaged in efforts to preserve their land from corporations and to protect their rights to their traditional livelihood, reindeer husbandry, which requires the use of 40% of their territory. Through their own parliamentary system, the Sámi people have thus far been able to negotiate with the Norwegian government and to protect their land.

In the Amazon region, the Yanomami and Kanamary peoples experience the dramatic effects of climate change. The seasons have changed and as a result the indigenous peoples themselves have changed – their life and their spirit have changed. They say that to change the direction of the river is to change the life of the people. They are unable to cultivate land in the interior because of the dry and the heat and so daily needs are not met. The fish are dying as well. The seasons have flipped – instead of the rainy season it is summer. This has had a devastating impact on the life cycles of both animal and plant life in the region. The indigenous peoples struggle to protect the land and to preserve their traditional way of life. They say “I am the earth. I

came from earth but God made us.” They see themselves as the ‘army of the forest’ – defenders of the land – but they feel the outside world sees them as a problem. They call for indigenous peoples to be recognized in living words and in actions, not just on paper.

Climate change impacts all peoples of the world but indigenous peoples are being affected disproportionately. They are on the frontlines of devastation and therefore they need to also be on the frontlines of solutions. While we all play a role in combating climate change, we need to work in collaboration with indigenous peoples in order to respect their right to self-determination and to protect their traditional ways of life. Care for the earth is the responsibility of us all, for the sake of the present and for the sake of the future. As one speaker noted, we do not inherit the land from our grandparents, we borrow the land from our grandchildren.

FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION

Am I aware of the indigenous people in my Province who are affected by climate change?
Is my Province working with these people to combat climate change to find sustainable solutions that will support their ways of life? If not, are there opportunities for my Province to become involved in these activities?
What is my personal commitment to combating climate change?
What actions can I personally take to help mitigate the effects of climate change?

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Give Me 5

<http://giveme-5.org>

The *Give Me 5* campaign recognizes that only 5% of current global government spending on military would be enough to fund the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy. You can get involved in this campaign and advocate for your government to reallocate funding from military spending towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

2020 or Bust

<http://www.2020orbust.org>

On the *2020 or Bust* website you can calculate your carbon footprint and then learn about ways to reduce it. You can also download the *2020 or Bust* app, and play along with the game as you reduce your carbon footprint.

Climate Initiatives Platform

<http://climateinitiativesplatform.org/index.php/Welcome>

On the Climate Initiatives Platform you can learn about climate change projects and innovative solutions that exist in your region. You may find the inspiration you need to tackle a climate change challenge in your province or you may have a solution to contribute.