



# SETTING FIRST NATIONS EXPECTATIONS FOR COP 27

Assembly of First Nations (AFN)



# Assembly of First Nations

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) is a national advocacy organization that works to advance the collective aspirations of First Nations individuals and communities across Canada on matters of national or international nature and concern. The AFN hosts two Assemblies a year where mandates and directives for the organization are established through resolutions directed and supported by the First Nations-in-Assembly (elected Chiefs or proxies from member First Nations). The AFN has more than 630 member First Nations.

In addition to the direction provided by Chiefs of each member First Nation, the AFN is guided by an Executive Committee consisting of an elected National Chief and Regional Chiefs from each province and territory. Representatives from five national councils (Knowledge Keepers, Youth, Veterans, 2SLGBTQQIA+ and Women) support and guide the decisions of the Executive Committee.

The AFN supports First Nations by coordinating, facilitating and advocating for policy change, while the leaders of this change are the First Nations. Chiefs representing First Nations must be an integral part of meeting the challenge of sustainable, transformative policy change. The AFN has been acting on this responsibility by leading discussions on climate change on the regional, national and international stages. From the First Nations-in-Assembly, the AFN is mandated by 11 climate-related resolutions since 2016.

Most recently, in Resolution 05/2019: Declaring a First Nations Climate Emergency, the Chiefs-in-Assembly resolve to:

1. Declare a global climate emergency.
2. Recognize that the climate crisis constitutes a state of emergency for our lands, waters, animals and peoples, and that we will accordingly utilize our local, national, and international forums and partnerships to keep global warming below 1.5°C
3. Call on local, national, and international communities, governments, organizations and movements to safeguard the inherent, Treaty and constitutionally protected rights of First Nations, respect Indigenous knowledge and uphold Treaties and other constructive arrangements between First Nations and the Crown
4. Direct the AFN to call on the federal, provincial and territorial governments to take urgent and transformative climate action that meets the requirements outlined in the reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and Canada in a Changing Climate to reduce emissions in Canada by 60 percent below 2010 levels by 2030 and reach net-zero emissions by 2050 Call on the AFN, with guidance from the Advisory Committee on Climate Action and the Environment (ACE), AFN regions, First Nations Elders, Knowledge Keepers, women, youth and leadership to develop a First Nations-led climate strategy, within six months, to achieve the objectives above and simultaneously address income inequality within First Nations as part of the mobilization for a just transition, and to host a National Gathering to advance local, domestic and international climate advocacy.



# 1. Introduction

The evidence is clear: we are facing joint global climate and biodiversity crises. The most up-to-date science, according to the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, projects that we have less than 10 years to avoid locking in a future where our children are facing the consequences of catastrophic climate change.<sup>1</sup> In Canada, for instance, the situation is urgent. Irreversible warming trends have now been confirmed by the *Canada in a Changing Climate Report* (2019), identifying that Canada's climate has warmed by 2.3°C since 1948 and will warm further, on average, at about double the magnitude of warming globally.<sup>2</sup> This comes as no surprise, as First Nations' Knowledge Keepers have been raising their voices about the changes that they are observing: changes in species migration, weather, and irreversible impacts to the land and waters. These observations are being formally captured as a growing number of First Nations are adding their voices to the call for rapid de-carbonization to meet the target of the Paris Agreement. One such example is the Vuntut Gwitch'in First Nation (VGFN), in Old Crow, Yukon. Their declaration, entitled "Yeendoo Diinehdoo Ji' heezrit Nits'oo Ts' o' Nan He' aa," which translates into "After Our Time, How Will the World Be?" laid the foundation for First Nations-in-Assembly to declare a national climate emergency, in 2019.<sup>3</sup>

In July 2019, First Nations-in-Assembly declared a *First Nations Climate Emergency*, recognizing that "...climate change constitutes a state of emergency for our lands, waters, animals, and peoples." The resolution laid out some immediate steps for the AFN to plan a National Climate Gathering and develop a National Climate Strategy. It directed the Strategy to stress urgent and transformative climate action that reduces emissions in Canada by 60 percent below 2010 levels by 2030 and reach net-zero emissions by 2050, while simultaneously addressing income inequality within First Nations as part of the mobilization for a just transition. Since passing this resolution, the AFN has hosted two AFN National Climate Gatherings. The first took place in March 2020 on the traditional territories of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, and most recently, in September 2022 convened on the unceded and unsundered territory of the Wolastoqiyik, Mi'kmaq and Peskotomuhkati peoples.

Combined, more than 1000 First Nations leaders, Knowledge Keepers, women, youth, gender-diverse peoples, academics and allies participated in these Gatherings, articulating the diversity of First Nations' perspectives on climate change and exploring First Nations-led solutions in a multi-dimensional, interconnected and interrelated way. Through this, it is clear that First Nations possess a deep and wholistic understanding of the root-causes of the climate crisis, positioning

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<sup>1</sup> For more details, please refer to several recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports, [Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability](#); [Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change](#); and [Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis](#).

<sup>2</sup> For more details, please refer to Canada in a Changing Climate, found here: <https://changingclimate.ca/>.

<sup>3</sup> From the Chiefs-in-Assembly, the AFN is mandated by eleven resolutions since 2016. Most recently, in Resolution 05/2019: Declaring a *First Nations Climate Emergency*. The full list of resolutions can be found on the AFN website: [www.afn.ca/resolutions](http://www.afn.ca/resolutions)

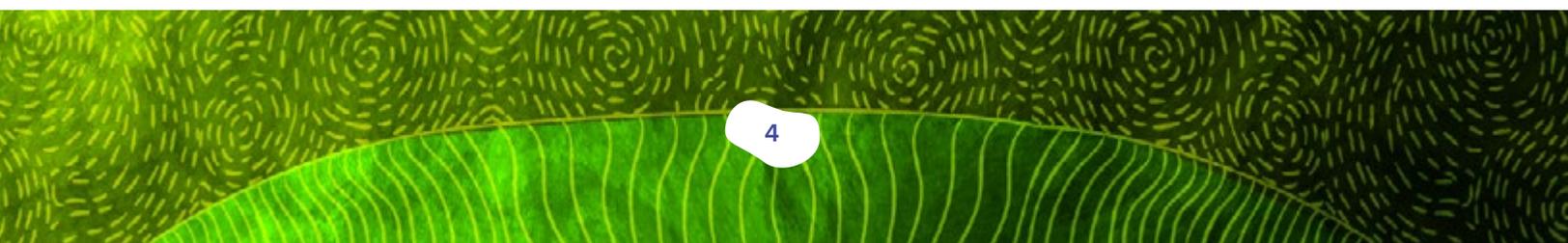


First Nations as active leaders in the drive to avert catastrophic climate change, both domestically and internationally. Indeed, at the international level, the Glasgow Climate Pact (the political text arising from COP 26 in Glasgow) emphasized “... the important role of [Indigenous Peoples’] culture and knowledge in effective action on climate change” and urged Parties to “...actively involve indigenous peoples and local communities in de-signing and implementing climate action.”<sup>4</sup>

In light of this recognition, we share this position paper in advance of the 27th Conference of the Parties (COP 27) hosted by Egypt in Sharm-El-Sheikh, with recommendations grouped into three main areas: i) implement the First Nations Climate Lens in sub-national, national and international climate policy; ii) take urgent and transformative climate action in line with the First Nations-in-Assembly Declaration of a First Nations Climate Emergency; and iii) uplift Indigenous Peoples’ governance, rights and knowledge systems within all areas of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). We begin with a discussion of the First Nations Climate Lens.

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<sup>4</sup> Paragraph 66, Glasgow Climate Pact



## 2. A First Nations Climate Lens

First Nations face unique climate risks because of how colonialism, in conjunction with capitalism, has shaped where we live, our socio-economic conditions and how we exercise our relationships with Mother Earth. These experiences and interconnections cannot be overlooked when contemplating climate-related solutions for (or by) First Nations. To better understand this reality, and to advance First Nations climate solutions, the AFN has developed the concept of a First Nations Climate Lens (Figure 1).



This Climate Lens seeks to challenge conventional conceptualizations of First Nations as ‘vulnerable’ populations and the ‘passive recipients’ of climate impacts. Indeed, our unique connections to the land, water, air, and non-human beings have enabled us to live reciprocally and in balance with all of Creation. The cultural, spiritual, and social connection to the land and water may increase First Nations’ exposure and sensitivity to climate change impacts, but it also provides a unique source of strength, understanding and resilience. The First Nations Climate Lens is based on an alignment of three concentric spheres of activity to help bring into focus the relationships between First Nations’ climate impacts, climate action, and the broader climate context.<sup>5</sup> It stresses the fact that First Nations are climate leaders and, as such, are active drivers of positive change. A fourth circle, characterizing the role of Natural / Spiritual law is currently being developed in partnership with the AFN’s Knowledge Keepers Council.

<sup>5</sup> For a full description of the First Nations Climate Lens, please refer to the AFN National Climate Gathering Report found here: [https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Climate\\_Gathering\\_Report\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Climate_Gathering_Report_ENG.pdf) and refer to a video from the Gathering here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICZh6uYTh1E&t=2s>



## a. Applying the First Nations Climate Lens to discussions at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

The concept of a First Nations Climate Lens has important procedural, conceptual, and substantive applications to the understanding and implementation of climate mitigation and adaptation within the UNFCCC, and in particular COP 27 in Egypt as an implementation COP.<sup>6</sup>

First, given the growing commitments on net-zero, we stress that it must not be interpreted as an end goal, where the only focus is on arriving at a point when “...anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere are balanced by anthropogenic removals of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere over a specified period.”<sup>7</sup> Instead, net-zero must be conceptualized as a process leading to a just, equitable, and resilient future for our future generations, founded on First Nation’s right to self-determination. To do so, the process to arrive at a just, equitable, and resilient future must be grounded in the leadership and direction of First Nations (and by extension other Indigenous Peoples).

Second, that a First Nations approach will confront the conventional “mitigation-adaptation” dichotomy – the separation between discussions on mitigation or adaptation action – rampant in international and domestic climate perspectives. As highlighted by our Climate Lens, the impacts of climate change are inseparable from First Nations’ lived realities, whether due to climate change or the ongoing legacy of colonialism. For this reason, the conventional mitigation-adaptation dichotomy rarely considers the complex and multi-dimensional nature of First Nations climate solutions – such as returning to the land, a focus on food sovereignty, locally generated power systems, and language revitalization. Given the interconnections between the sectors and systems upon which First Nations rely (e.g., health, food, energy, transportation, etc.), this false dichotomy must be challenged to enable an acknowledgement of holistic, integrated, and systems-based solutions that must address the existential threat that is climate change.

Third, that there is a need for a new narrative that does not rely on current technology and advances in technological solutions as well as market-based approaches. These colonial narratives presume a continuation of the structurally inequitable and racist systems, which have led us to this compounding environmental crisis in the first place. In a global climate crisis, we should not accept a largely status quo model of tweaking where oil and gas production are allowed to increase through an overreliance on carbon offset technologies that are not in fact commercially viable.<sup>8</sup> Rather, the Climate Lens offers an opportunity to critically examine the interrelationship between the three C’s – carbon, colonialism, and capitalism – and centering an approach rooted in relationships that value the nexus of people and land and water, and

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<sup>6</sup> For more about the COP 27 Presidency’s Vision for COP, please refer to: <https://cop27.eg/#/presidency/events>.

<sup>7</sup> This specific definition is found within the Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act (found here: <https://parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-2/bill/C-12/royal-assent>), but is common within the discussions on net-zero.

<sup>8</sup> A recent report, Correcting Canada’s “one eye shut” climate policy, uses Government of Canada data (drawn from the Canadian Energy Regulator) to show that more oil and gas is expected to be produced in 2050 than in 2019—the oil and gas sector in Canada will still be emitting some 200 megatons of CO2 equivalent in 2050. This raises an important concern for Canadian climate policy.



their mutual reciprocity. This approach seeks to enable a reset with the systems and structures that seem to trap us in a destructive cycle, while advancing the self-determination of First Nations to reclaim their rightful place as Nations and original stewards of their lands and waters.

And fourth, while there is growing international recognition of the unique role Indigenous Knowledge systems play in the creation of solutions, there is little engagement with what this would mean substantially.<sup>9</sup> For example, based on an understanding grounded in First Nations knowledge systems that we are ‘one with the land and water’ – rather than compartmentalized units apart from nature – all discussions would need to center on the reciprocal relationships that embody our global ecosystem. Such an approach recognizes that First Nations knowledge systems, while unique to each individual First Nation, problematize the drivers of the climate crisis differently than mainstream systems. Put another way, a more meaningful application of the First Nations Climate Lens would begin with establishing a shared understanding of what is driving the climate crisis, and based on that shared understanding, determining appropriate actions using this starting point. This deeper conversation is lacking in the current process and may be detrimental to future climate action by, for example, locking in an ontological path of dependency that force’s First Nations knowledge systems to ‘fit’ into mainstream knowledge systems focused on technology and markets. This process must be broadened to be more inclusive in its consideration of Indigenous Knowledge systems.

### 3. Key Priority Areas for COP 27

These applications of the First Nations Climate Lens bring into focus the issues and conversations required to uplift First Nations climate solutions and support the re-framing of the climate conversation towards more transformative and systemic changes. Based on these, we propose three areas of recommendations for COP 27 in Sharm-El-Sheikh.<sup>10</sup>

#### a. Implement the First Nations Climate Lens in sub-national, national, and international climate policy

The application of the First Nations Climate Lens has distinct benefits for the design, implementation and monitoring of sub-national, national and international climate policy. This extends to the inclusion of the minimum standards of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*

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<sup>9</sup> There has been constructive work done by the Facilitative Working Group of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform within the UNFCCC. For instance, please refer to the series of Webinars considering the ethical and equitable engagement with Indigenous knowledge: <https://lcipp.unfccc.int/calendar-events/lcipp-webinar-2-what-does-ethical-and-equitable-engagement-indigenous-knowledge-climate-change-look>. Furthermore, the Annual Gathering of Indigenous Knowledge Holders is another example of making space for Indigenous knowledge systems within the UNFCCC. The outcome of that Gathering can be found here: <https://lcipp.unfccc.int/information-hub/information-record-detail?source=896&typere-source=918&id=456>

<sup>10</sup> We are grateful for the work of the Inuit Circumpolar Council’s UNFCCC COP 26 Position Paper (found here: <https://www.inuitcircumpolar.com/project/inuit-call-for-the-tools-needed-to-protect-the-arctic/>) and have built on many of the suggestions in these recommendations.



(UN Declaration), as well as First Nations inherent rights, grounded in Indigenous law, Indigenous legal traditions and customary law. In this way, climate solutions proposed at COP 27 (i.e., such as net-zero commitments, nature-based solutions, loss and damage) cannot be separated from the required implementation of a rights- and responsibilities-based approach to climate change. For instance, and as outlined above, an over-reliance on the development of technological and market-based solutions, without a critical investigation of the inequitable and structurally racist ways that these solutions interact with First Nations' lived realities, will further harm First Nations and may contribute to what has been described as a new form of 'climate' colonialism. This is particularly acute in the context of forestry, agriculture, water management and other nature-based solutions, where discussions have largely neglected the presence of First Nations' jurisdiction, rights and legal systems. Solutions for these sectors cannot disregard their role in advancing decolonization. As such, we strongly recommend the following:

- i. Review all proposed climate-related activities, such as the Global Stocktake, through the First Nations Climate Lens, considering the minimum standards of the UN Declaration, First Nations inherent rights, the principles of intergenerational equity, justice, and decolonization, and Seven Generations thinking.*
- ii. Ensure that all emission removal methods contemplated – such as nature-based solutions and carbon capture, utilization, and storage – uphold First Nations right to self-determination, including the minimum standard of free, prior, and informed consent.*
- iii. Acknowledge the inherent limitations of the current climate funding processes and create space for direct First Nations involvement with equitable and sustained funding, including in conversations on Adaptation and Loss and Damage.*
- iv. Ensure that the Global Stocktake under the Paris Agreement includes reports data and observations produced by First Nations and other Indigenous Peoples (such as the Indigenous Knowledges section of the Climate Atlas).*
- v. Advance a Gender-Based Analysis (GBA+), grounded in First Nation worldviews, in all areas of the UNFCCC, including the Gender Action Plan and the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform, to consider the diverse and intersectional ways that climate change affects First Nations men, women, Knowledge Keepers, youth, and gender-diverse, and develop specific solutions for climate policy.*

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<sup>11</sup> For more, see: Cameron, L., Courchene, D., Ijaz, S., & Mauro, I. (2021). 'A change of heart': Indigenous perspectives from the Onjisy Aki Summit on climate change. *Climatic Change*, 164(3), 1-21 and Reed, G., Gobby, J., Sinclair, R., Ivey, R., & Matthews, H. D. (2021). Indigenizing Climate Policy in Canada: A Critical Examination of the Pan-Canadian Framework and the ZéN RoadMap. *Frontiers in Sustainable Cities*, 78.

<sup>12</sup> To be clear, this is not an endorsement of any emission removal technology. First Nations believe emission reduction must be prioritized over removal, however given the emphasis in the most recent federal budget, any pursuit of emission removal approaches or technologies must be done with the free, prior, and informed consent of First Nations.



## **b. Take urgent and transformative climate action in line with the Chiefs-in-Assembly Declaration of a First Nations Climate Emergency**

First Nations-in-Assembly have been clear in their expectations for Canada, and by extension all Parties to the UNFCCC, on their required emission reduction targets, calling for: *urgent and transformative climate action that reduces emissions in Canada by 60 percent below 2010 levels by 2030*, and to reach net-zero emissions by 2050. In an ‘implementation COP’, these reductions cannot be words on paper (such as the process of Nationally Determined Contributions) but must translate into concrete action on the ground. For First Nations, this operationalizes the First Nations Climate Lens by recognizing that the conventional binary between mitigation and adaptation does not serve the depth and complexity of First Nations-led climate solutions. As such, we strongly recommend the following:

- i. All Parties must update their Nationally Determined Contributions in line with the Chiefs-in-Assembly Declaration of a First Nations Climate Emergency to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius.*
- ii. Invest in the diversity of First Nations-led and designed climate solutions (including other Indigenous Peoples) such as First Nations efforts on [health and mental wellness](#), [language revitalization](#), [energy](#), [food security](#), [water](#), [biodiversity](#) and [conservation](#).<sup>13</sup>*

## **c. Uplift Indigenous Peoples’ governance, rights, and knowledge systems within all areas of the UNFCCC**

Indigenous Peoples have been pushing for the the inclusion of their knowledge, rights, and governance in the UNFCCC since the original Rio Convention (signed in 1992). This was strengthened at COP 21 in Paris when Indigenous Peoples were successful in getting rights-based language included in the Paris Agreement preamble: “Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote, and consider their respective obligations on human rights, including the rights of Indigenous Peoples.” Since this point, the recognition of the unique role and contributions of Indigenous Peoples has been growing, including with the adoption of the second, three-year workplan of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (‘the Platform’).<sup>14</sup> This leadership and advocacy must continue, as the distinct role of First Nations, and Indigenous Peoples, continue to grow within the UNFCCC.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> This represents a small number of initiatives led by First Nations across the country. For additional examples of First Nations leadership, please refer to: Indigenous Clean Energy, Indigenous Climate Action, Indigenous Climate Hub, and ClimateTelling.info

<sup>14</sup> For more about the Platform, please refer to the website (<https://icipp.unfccc.int/>), as well as the history outlined with the Indigenous World series (beginning in 2019): <https://www.iwgia.org/en/resources.html>

<sup>15</sup> For more, please refer to the Center for International Environmental Law’s publication in collaboration with the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change, on the growing references to Indigenous Peoples within the UNFCCC: <https://www.ciel.org/reports/indigenous-peoples-and-traditional-knowledge-in-the-context-of-the-un-framework-convention-on-climate-change-2020-update/> believe emission reduction must be prioritized over removal, however given the emphasis in the most recent federal budget, any pursuit of emission removal approaches or technologies must be done with the free, prior, and informed consent of First Nations.



To do this, we strongly recommend the following:

- i. Ensure that the Annual Knowledge Holders Gathering and Youth Roundtable, hosted by the Facilitative Working Group of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform, are given appropriate prominence and recognition within the Blue Zone, ensuring that the messages and recommendations from these representatives are shared and implemented by all Parties to the UNFCCC.*
- ii. Develop clear operational guidance for the braiding of First Nations' and mainstream knowledge systems, informing the conceptualization of the drivers of the climate crisis, emission reduction targets, adaptation, loss and damage, and other climate solutions.*
- iii. Ensure the ethical and equitable use First Nations Knowledge Systems within the IPCC assessment process and other major climate-related reports intended as an evidence base for climate policy, and support First Nation Knowledge Keepers so that they may serve as substantive authors and contributors.*

## 4. Conclusion

The magnitude of this challenge will require a transformational shift in the approach that Canada and the world take to address the climate crisis. Current approaches are failing, as emissions and inequality rise exponentially. We have laid out three priority areas expressing First Nation expectations for COP 27, in order to position First Nations as active leaders in the drive to avert catastrophic climate change, both domestically and internationally. Combined, this application of the First Nations Climate Lens to discussions at the UNFCCC must enable more meaningful conversations about how First Nations' solutions can re-frame the conversation and lead to transformative systemic change.





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