

UN Climate Change Conference COP 29

The Saami Climate Council, Finland Statement on UN Climate Change Conference (COP 29)

Introduction

The climate crisis knows no borders, and its impacts are felt by all, yet not equally. The Saami people, the Indigenous people of Sápmi, that occupy a territory spanning across Northern territories of Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Russia, have faced and are facing the profound effects of climate change to their culture, livelihoods, and way of life.¹ Saami homeland and the Arctic are warming up to 3-4 times faster than the rest of the world.² The Arctic has seen a warming trend of 0.73 °C in a decade,³ and Saami have observed changes in their living environment already in the 1980's. The younger Saami generation has only experienced the environment that has already been affected by climate change and Saami traditions that have adapted to climate change.⁴

The Saami Climate Council, established in Finland under the Climate Act (423/2022), is tasked with providing information on climate change from the perspective of Saami culture to authorities and the Saami community for decision-making and raising awareness of the impacts of climate change on Saami culture. The Saami Climate Council promotes interaction between science and Saami traditional knowledge and produces information in the form of reports and statements that support Saami culture in adapting to and mitigating climate change. The council's activities, statements and publications are based on academic knowledge and Saami traditional knowledge.

The Council reminds that indigenous people are especially vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change due to their close relationship to the environment, which can be seen in historical injustices, such as assimilation policies, colonization and lack of participatory

¹ Näkkäljærvi, K., Juntunen, S. & Jaakkola, J. 2022. Cultural perception and adaptation to climate change among Reindeer Saami communities in Finland. In: Heimann, T. (ed.) *Climate Cultures in Europe and North America Local, Regional and Transatlantic Formation of Climate Change Knowledge and Action*. Routledge, London

² Zhou, W., Leung, L. R. & Lu, J. 2024. Steady threefold Arctic amplification of externally forced warming masked by natural variability. *Nat. Geosci.* <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41561-024-01441-1>; Rantanen, M., Karpechko, A.Y., Lipponen, A. *et al.* 2022. The Arctic has warmed nearly four times faster than the globe since 1979. *Commun Earth Environ* **3**, 168. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-022-00498-3>

³ Rantanen, M., Karpechko, A.Y., Lipponen, A. *et al.* 2022. The Arctic has warmed nearly four times faster than the Globe since 1979. *Commun Earth Environ* **3**, 168. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-022-00498-3>

⁴ Näkkäljærvi, K., Juntunen, S., Jaakkola, J.K. 2020. *SAAMI – Saamelaisten sopeutuminen ilmastonmuutokseen- hankkeen tieteellinen loppuraportti*. (Final scientific report of the project SAAMI - Adaptation of the Saami people to climate change. Valtioneuvoston selvitys- ja tutkimustoiminnan julkaisusarja 2020:25. Valtioneuvoston kanslia, Helsinki. Available: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-287-930-1>. 400 pp.

rights.⁵ Climate change has had an adverse impact on the enjoyment of human rights⁶ and it is considered probably the greatest human rights challenge of the 21st century.⁷ The human rights aspect had been included in the preambular of the Paris Agreement on climate change, where it is stated that the states should, when taking action to address climate change respect human rights and the rights of indigenous peoples.⁸ UN Human Rights Committee has found under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights significant and fast national and international efforts are needed to mitigate the effects of climate change, which otherwise may be a violation of the right to life.⁹ According to the decision, indigenous people have right for protection against climate change and existing human rights instruments provide legal protection against the adverse effects of climate change.

The Saami Climate Council will focus in this statement on the themes concerning Arctic and Sápmi.

Summary and main message for the policymakers

- The Saami Climate Council recalls that Saami culture is vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change and possibilities for culturally sustainable adaptation are limited by national legislation and livelihood policies.
- The Council demands the Parties to the Convention to stringent emissions reductions urgently to achieve net zero CO₂ emissions by 2050, with full respect of international human rights obligations, so that the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C target could be reached.
- The Council recalls the Parties to respect the rights of indigenous people in all the COP 29 decisions according to the Paris Agreement and acknowledge the academic knowledge produced by IPCC on required climate measures to mitigate climate change.

⁵ UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. Available:

https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf A statement by Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 16th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Available: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2023/07/indigenous-peoples-can-lead-us-all-through-turbulence-and-risks-our-era-turk>

⁶ Human Rights Council. (2016). *Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 1 July 2016 32/33. Human rights and climate change. A/HRC/RES/32/33*

⁷ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2015). *Understanding Human Rights and Climate Change. Submission of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.*

⁸ Paris Agreement 2015. Available:

https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/application/pdf/english_paris_agreement.pdf

⁹ *Views adopted by the Committee under article 5 (4) of the Optional Protocol, concerning communication No. 3624/2019, CCPR/C/135/D/3624/2019, 2022.*

- The Council urges COP 29, the European Union and Nordic countries to secure the significant financial investments for reducing emissions in the whole global supply chain with full respect of international human rights obligations.
- The Council calls EU and Nordic countries for developing co-production of knowledge in climate policy and action, including academic knowledge and traditional knowledge.
- The Council highlights, that in Sápmi climate mitigation and adaptation measures must be planned and executed based on the knowledge base produced by academic knowledge and Saami traditional knowledge and with the full respect of international human rights obligations.
- The Council urges the Nordic countries to allocate resources for climate adaptation in traditional Saami livelihoods. The Council recalls, that reindeer grazing is important for climate mitigation in the Sápmi and vital for the survival of Saami culture.
- The Council expresses an urgent need to create indicators to monitor effects of climate change to Saami people and Arctic indigenous people and need for systematic monitoring combining academic knowledge and traditional knowledge.
- The Council calls all the Parties to the Convention to remember their intergenerational responsibility and implement sustainable development goals in climate decisions.
- Saami Climate Council calls all the Parties to the Convention to allocate resources for indigenous peoples' adaptation to climate change, to culturally and ecologically sustainable climate mitigation and participation to climate policy.

Background

According to Intergovernmental panel on Climate Change, Indigenous and local knowledge (ILK) can play a key role in climate change adaptation with *high confidence*.¹⁰ IPCC highlights, that 'indigenous, local, and traditional knowledge systems and practices, including indigenous peoples' holistic view of community and environment, are a major resource for adapting to climate change, but these have not been used consistently in existing adaptation efforts. Integrating such forms of knowledge with existing practices increases the effectiveness of adaptation.'¹¹ IPCC has proposed co-production of knowledge, combining academic and traditional knowledge and technology, as one of central means for climate

¹⁰ IPCC: SPECIAL REPORT ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND LAND. Chapter 7.6.4. Participation.
Available: <https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/chapter/chapter-7/>

¹¹ IPCC: Summary for Policymakers of the Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, p.26.

mitigation and adaptation in the Arctic.¹² The measure proposed by IPCC has not been implemented in the Arctic Parties to the Convention. Saami Climate Council combining academic, and Saami traditional knowledge can be an Arctic solution to co-produce knowledge to meet international climate and human rights targets. However, this work requires sufficient resources.

The Saami way of life, use of natural resources and traditional livelihoods are based on culturally and ecologically sustainable governance, with a deep respect for and relationships with the environment. Saami traditional knowledge¹³, passed down through generations, is deeply rooted in this environment and its seasonal variations. Traditional Saami knowledge and skills have been a key for a thriving society and environment and today, is a vital resource for understanding and responding to the complex and rapidly evolving challenges posed by climate change. Based on academic research and observations from traditional knowledge, practicing traditional Saami livelihoods, such as reindeer herding and fishing, have become more difficult due to climate change and will face new challenges in the future.

Climate change threatens the Atlantic salmon, which has declined in recent years in both the Teno and Näättämö rivers despite the placed strict protection measures in the Teno River. In other northern water bodies, the reproduction of salmonid fish, such as Arctic char (*Salvelinus alpinus*) in mountain lakes, suffers from rising water temperatures. The newcomer in the northern rivers is the invasive pink salmon (*Oncorhynchus gorbuscha*). Its presence must be adapted to, while at the same time there is a need of finding ways to save the Atlantic salmon migrating to the Teno and Näättämö rivers.¹⁴

Reindeer herding suffers seriously from the fluctuation between thaw and frost, which sometimes freezes the snow cover so hard that reindeer cannot dig through the ice to feed on lichen. In many recent winters, permanent snow has fallen on wet and warm ground, leading to the mold growth on ground vegetation and the freezing of the ground, preventing reindeer from accessing food.¹⁵

¹² IPCC: Summary for Policymakers of the Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, p.24.

¹³ A committee, nominated by Finnish Ministry of Environment, has defined Saami traditional knowledge as follows: "Saami traditional knowledge on biodiversity is manifested in Saami use of nature and traditional Saami livelihoods, i.e. reindeer herding, fishing, hunting, gathering and handicrafts, as well as natural relationships. The information is conveyed in the Saami terminology related to nature, terrain, weather, reindeer herding, handicrafts, fishing and hunting, as well as in place names in the Saami language. Traditional knowledge is passed on through conscious teaching, model from older generations, yoiks and oral narrative traditions, as well as reindeer herding, fishing, gathering in handicraft and hunting practices." Ministry of Environment 2011. *Biologista monimuotoisuutta koskevan yleissopimuksen alkuperäiskansojen perinnetietoa käsittelevän artikla 8j:n kansallisen asiantuntijatyöryhmän loppuraportti (Final report of National Expert Committee on Article 8j of the Convention on Biological Diversity on Indigenous Peoples' Traditional Knowledge)*, Ministry of Environment, Helsinki.

¹⁴ Tana Monitoring and Research Group 2024. Status of the Tana/Teno River salmon populations in 2023. Saatavilla: <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe202401112369>

¹⁵ Turunen, M., Rasmus, S., Bavay, M., Ruosteenoja, K. & Heiskanen, J. 2016. Coping with difficult weather and snow conditions: Reindeer herders' views on climate change impacts and coping strategies, *Climate Risk Management*, Vol. 11, pp 15-36, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.crm.2016.01.002>

Climate change has direct negative social and cultural impacts on Saami livelihoods. If the foundation of Saami livelihoods disappears, the connection between practical and traditional knowledge may break, leading to a weakening of the vitality of Saami society, culture, and intergenerational knowledge. The negative effects of climate change on human health, including an increase in accidents due to changing natural conditions, affect all age groups. As climate change progresses and the northern environment changes, hesitation in responding to challenges creates a sense of injustice, violation of fundamental rights, and neglect of the rights of future generations.¹⁶ Community, collectively set goals, and actions based on them are essential to prevent such development.

Climate mitigation, especially wind turbine development in Norway and Sweden, has been opposed by Saami. In 2021, the Norwegian Supreme Court ruled on the appeals of reindeer Saami communities against the Fosen Vind wind farm near Trondheim. The Supreme Court ruled that wind power construction violated the cultural rights of the Saami people, especially reindeer herding rights, which are guaranteed by the Convention on Civil and Political Rights.¹⁷ Wind power is part of the climate change mitigation and adaptation, but the climate change mitigation must not violate the fundamental and human rights of the Saami people. Similar climate litigation may become more common if national procedures, impact assessments and sociocultural justice are not safeguarded in projects from the outset. It is also important to ensure that climate adaptation strategies identify the intergenerational impacts of climate change and respect fundamental human rights.

Appeal

We urge all parties at COP, especially the European Union and Nordic countries, to recognize and integrate co-production of knowledge, including academic and traditional knowledge, more effectively as a key component of climate action in concrete terms and actionable measures. This requires more than just acknowledgment; it demands providing support in financial resources, genuine collaboration, and partnership with Indigenous communities. Parties of the Convention must ensure that their decisions are based on best available knowledge, including academic and traditional knowledge. The European Union and Nordic have a special responsibility for the Arctic and indigenous peoples. With their long-standing commitment to environmental protection and social equity, both are uniquely positioned to set a precedent for the world by integrating co-production of knowledge, academic and traditional knowledge, into national and international climate policies. By doing so, they can demonstrate how respecting and empowering Indigenous peoples is not only a matter of justice but also a key strategy for achieving more resilient and holistic climate solutions.

¹⁶ Näkkäljärvi, K., Juntunen, S., Jaakkola, J.K. 2020. *SAAMI – Saamelaisten sopeutumisen ilmastonmuutokseen- hankkeen tieteellinen loppuraportti*. (Final scientific report of the project SAAMI - Adaptation of the Saami people to climate change. Valtioneuvoston selvitys- ja tutkimustoiminnan julkaisusarja 2020:25. Valtioneuvoston kanslia, Helsinki. Available: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-287-930-1>. 400 pp.

¹⁷ Fjellheim, E. M. 2022. Green colonialism, wind energy and climate justice in Sápmi. IWGIA – International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs. <https://www.iwgia.org/en/news/4956-green-colonialism,-wind-energy-and-climate-justice-in-s%C3%A1pmi.html>

To understand the holistic effects of climate change in the Sápmi and Arctic, there is a need for systematic monitoring, including academic and traditional knowledge, of the cultural, environmental and intergenerational effects of climate change. This kind of co-production of knowledge and recognizing and incorporating these practices into national and international climate policies can lead to more equitable and effective climate solutions.

In conclusion, the fight against climate change is not just a technical challenge; it is a moral imperative. The Saami Climate Council in Finland urges the global community to stand with Indigenous peoples and scientific community, not just in words, but in action and joint effort, to ensure that our collective efforts lead to a world where future generations can thrive as part of our environments and the planet as a whole.

The statement was adopted by Saami Climate Council in its meeting on 15.11.2024.

Distribution:

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