



INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR CONFERENCE

February 12, 2005

To:

Honourable Tom Bates, Mayor of Berkeley,
His Excellency Enele Sopoaga, Ambassador of Tuvalu to the United Nations
Honoured Guests
Citizens of Berkeley

As the elected Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference which represents internationally the 155,000 Inuit who live in Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Chukotka, Russia, I want to thank the Citizens of Berkeley for your efforts to reduce Berkeley's greenhouse gas emissions. I congratulate you on assuming leadership where others fear to tread. I wish I could be here to celebrate with you today.

Global Warming is one of the biggest challenges facing humanity. It is only by adding up many efforts, such as yours, that we will veer away from a destiny that is not a pre-ordained.

I believe that we find ourselves at the very cusp of a defining moment in the history of the planet. The earth is melting and we must all come together to do the right thing to address Climate Change. Global Warming connects us all – from the Arctic where I live, to the vibrant City of Berkeley, to the Pacific Islands of Tuvalu. The connections are not indirect either -- as the Arctic melts the islands of the Pacific flood.

The Inuit have a strong connection to the environment. Many of us still depend on the land and sea to sustain our families. Our culture and our lives depend on the ice and the maintenance of the climate that has shaped and sustained us for thousands of year. But since the mid-1970s, our elders and hunters – who have intimate knowledge of the land, sea and ice of the Arctic – have observed disturbing changes that threaten to destroy us and our culture.

For example, the sea-ice upon which we depend for travel and hunting arrives later and melts earlier than it used to, often making it impossible for us to get to the places where we hunt. Our hunters risk injury or death from the collapse of thinned ice. Weather patterns that we have read accurately for millennia to ensure safe travel and hunting have become unpredictable. Fall storms have become frequent and severe, making boat travel extremely demanding and progressively more dangerous.

The permafrost on which our villages are built is melting. The loss of sea-ice exposes our coasts to erosion. Some of our villages are losing as much as 100 feet per year. The glaciers are

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melting, too, turning streams into torrents that we and the animal species on which we depend cannot cross.

New species of plants, birds and fish – barn owls, robins, pin-tailed ducks, salmon and grizzly bears – some we have never seen are competing with species upon which our lives and culture are built. The scientists tell us that some of the species we know, such as the polar bears, may be extinct by the end of this century because of the changing climate. We are being invaded by black flies and disease-bearing mosquitoes that we have not previously known.

Our observations are confirmed by western science in the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) which was endorsed by the eight Arctic Nations, including the United States, this past November. Two key conclusions from the ACIA are particularly worrisome for Inuit:

1. Marine species dependent on sea-ice including polar bears, ice living seals, walrus, and some marine birds are very likely to decline, with some facing extinction; and
2. For Inuit, warming is likely to disrupt or even destroy their hunting and food sharing culture as reduced sea-ice causes the animals on which they depend to decline, become less accessible or possibly go extinct.

These findings do not come from a ‘radical’ environmental group with an axe to grind but from the most comprehensive regional Climate Change assessment ever undertaken. Over 300 Scientists and many indigenous peoples of the Arctic actively participated in this assessment. It states that our ancient connection to our hunting culture may well disappear, and within my grandson's lifetime.

Inuit face many challenges in finding a place in the new world order of globalization. A place that affords us self-respect and security, and in which we also contribute to the well-being of others. Notwithstanding our struggles and our limited numbers, we Inuit do have a significant role to play globally. Climate change is happening first and fastest in the Arctic. My homeland—the Arctic—is the health barometer for the planet.

If we can reverse the emission of climate change inducing greenhouse gases in time to save the Arctic from the most devastating impact of global warming, then we can spare untold suffering for hundreds of millions of people around the globe. Protect the Arctic and we Save the Planet. Use us in the Arctic as your early warning system.

In the 1940s, the United States set up a distant early warning system throughout the North American Arctic called the DEW line—short for Distant Early Warning—to protect against the threat of the Soviet Union. It is now time for another DEW line—Distant Environmental Warning—to protect against climate change.

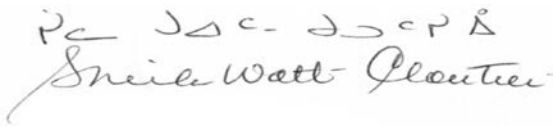
A few months ago, I testified in front of Senator McCain’s committee in Washington, D.C. I want to leave you with the same words now.

“Global warming connects us all -- the planet and its people are one. The Inuit hunter who falls through the depleting and unpredictable sea- ice is connected to the cars we drive, the industries we rely upon, and the disposable world we have become.

I grew up in the small community of Kuujjuaq in the Ungava Bay in northern Quebec and traveled by dog team for the first ten years of my life. Americans played a very important role in the history of my community. During the Second World War, many Inuit were starving, caught in a transition between a nomadic way of life and moving into a settled community. At that time, when most Inuit thought they had been totally forgotten, the Americans arrived to build airstrips, bringing with them jobs for the men, and supplies and food for the community. They came through for us during those challenging times in a very big way. Until her death two years ago, my mother always stated: "we would not have pulled through if it were not for the arrival of the Americans".

The Inuit once again need your help in these challenging times. Global Warming, if it continues unabated, will mean the end of Inuit as a hunting culture that has sustained us for millennia. Through efforts such as yours, here in Berkeley, you can come back to help us. I have already said that what is happening in the Arctic is a snapshot of the future of the planet, and that, indeed, we are all connected. Climate change is a matter of the survival of humanity as whole. It is the most pressing global issue we face today. Protect the Arctic and we will save the planet.”

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sheila Watt-Cloutier". Above the signature, there are some faint, illegible markings that appear to be initials or a reference code.

Sheila Watt-Cloutier
Chair