

Native American Rights Fund

Indigenous Peoples' Rights

<https://www.narf.org/cases/climate-change/>

Campaign and Advocacy

Recognizing the threat of climate change to homelands and ways of life, the National Congress of American Indians joined climate change negotiations at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Status: Active

Because of their close connection to the natural world, Indigenous Peoples are among those most affected by climate change, despite their negligible carbon footprint. Recognizing climate changes threat to homelands and ways of life, the National Congress of American Indians and the Native American Rights Fund (NARF) have joined the community of nations in climate change negotiations at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). NARF participates on behalf of its client NCAI as part of the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change.

On December 12, 2015, at the COP21 (Conference of the Parties 21) in Paris, the 195 participating parties agreed to the first ever universally binding accord on climate change, the Paris Agreement.

In preparation for Paris, the Norwegian government donated funding to enable greater Indigenous participation in the process. Regional consultations of Indigenous Peoples took place in all seven regions of the world and dozens of Indigenous representatives from around the world came to Paris, including numerous representatives from United States tribes. This participation was crucial in lobbying for language concerning Indigenous issues in the Agreement itself and the Decision adopting it.

The Indigenous caucus had several issues which it pushed for inclusion in the Agreement. One of the most important was to get a provision in the operative section of the Agreement recognizing that climate change policies and procedures had to respect, protect, promote, and fulfill the rights of Indigenous Peoples within a broad human rights framework. The effort resulted in a provision which states:

Acknowledging that climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the rights to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity

A second issue of importance to the Indigenous caucus was the recognition of the importance of indigenous Peoples knowledge in relation to climate change. To that end, the Paris Decision established a Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform to provide an opening for traditional knowledge to influence climate policy at local, regional, and international levels.

While the platform was established at COP 21, the implementation has been incremental. An historic step forward in implementing the platform was taken at COP 24, held December 2018 in Katowice, Poland. The COP established a Facilitative Working Group, which will develop a work plan for the platform.

The working group will have fourteen representatives, seven country representatives and seven Indigenous representatives appointed by Indigenous Peoples (one from each of the seven regions of the world). This representation of Indigenous Peoples is unprecedented, marking the first time that Indigenous representatives (chosen by Indigenous Peoples) will participate on an equal basis with states within a United Nations body.

Ultimately, the platform will institutionalize dialogue between states and Indigenous Peoples, foster Indigenous participation in the discussions on environmental policy, and encourage a holistic response to climate change. According to a statement from the UN:

Indigenous Peoples constitute less than five percent of the worlds population, but they safeguard 80 percent of the worlds biodiversity. The global response to climate change requires applying all of the best knowledge available, including the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples and local communities at the front lines of climate change. Indigenous Peoples are not only among the most vulnerable to its impacts, but they also hold many of the solutions to adapting to climate change.

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