



Centering First Nations Self-Determination in Transformative Climate Action at COP 30

Position Paper
November 2025



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Assembly of First Nations

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) is the national political organization for First Nations, including those living on and off reserve. While the leaders of change are First Nations themselves, the AFN supports First Nations by coordinating, facilitating, and advocating for policy change. Chiefs, and the First Nations they represent, must be an integral part of meeting the challenge of sustainable, transformative policy change. Mandated by the First Nations-in-Assembly, the AFN has been acting on this responsibility by leading discussions on climate change at the regional, national, and international stage, receiving 12 climate-specific resolutions since 2016.

In July 2023, the First Nations-in-Assembly passed Resolution 36/2023, *Urgent and Transformative Climate Action through the AFN National Climate Strategy*, resolving to:

1. Reaffirm the declaration of a First Nations Climate Emergency, calling for:
 - a. A recognition that the climate crisis constitutes a state of emergency for our lands, waters, air, ice, animals, and Peoples;
 - b. Local, national, and international communities, governments, organizations, and movements to safeguard the inherent, Treaty and constitutionally protected rights of First Nations, respect First Nations knowledge systems, and uphold Treaties and other constructive arrangements between First Nations and the Crown; and
 - c. 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's Changing Climate Report (2019) to reduce emissions in Canada by 60% below 2010 levels by 2030 and reach net-zero emissions by 2050.
2. Fully endorse the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Climate Strategy and its seven key priority areas of action:
 - a. Prioritize First Nation Knowledge Systems, health, languages, cultures, and spiritualities.
 - b. Recognize, respect, and position First Nations inherent jurisdiction and inherent right to self-determination as central to decision-making at all levels.
 - c. Address capacity needs to support First Nations governance and First Nations role as climate leaders.
 - d. Ensure First Nations self-sufficiency in food, water, and energy.
 - e. Close the natural and built infrastructure gap.
 - f. Ensure First Nations are equipped to mitigate, prevent, respond, and recover to all emergencies.
 - g. Leverage the First Nations Climate Lens to reform federal, provincial, and territorial legislation, regulation, policy, and programs.



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3. Call on the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to work directly, and in full partnership with, First Nations rights and title holders to implement self-determined First Nations climate priorities, including but not limited to those outlined in the AFN National Climate Strategy.
4. Direct the AFN to work with First Nations rights and title holders to advocate to the federal, provincial, and territorial governments for sufficient and sustainable funding to First Nations to implement their own strategies in a manner consistent with Article 39 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
5. Call on the federal government to compensate First Nations with new or additional land for any land that First Nations may lose due to climate change.
6. Direct the AFN to use the AFN National Climate Strategy in national and international contexts as an advocacy tool, including with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).



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1. Introduction

Over thirty years ago, world leaders at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the Rio 'Earth Summit,' signed the original UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), setting the groundwork for international climate action for decades to come. In preparation for the Summit, the First Nations-in-Assembly passed Resolution 22/1991, *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil, June 1992*, calling for First Nations to attend and highlight "...the obligated responsibility of First Nations to protect Mother Earth for future generations by exercising our role and purpose as caretakers of the Earth". Although no AFN delegation attended, the messages from the resolution still resonate today: "...[the Summit] is a historic opportunity for First Nations to address the world community on our value systems, spiritual knowledge, and advance issues of concern that affect our people".

For the three decades that followed the Summit, First Nations have actively participated calling for urgent climate action and for an end to the environmental destructions of their homelands. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN), for example, has received numerous mandates from the First Nations-in-Assembly to participate and advocate for the direct inclusion and protection of First Nations rights, knowledge systems, and governance in all discussions at the UNFCCC. This includes participating in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol (Resolution 09/1997, *Climate Change and Canada's International Obligations*, and Resolution 11/2005, *Climate Change*), the signing of the 2015 Paris Agreement (Resolution 51/2015, *Inclusion of Indigenous Rights in Paris Agreement and Resulting Strategies*), and its implementation (Resolution 97/2016, *First Nations Full and Meaningful Inclusion in Climate Action* and Resolution 101/2017, *Supporting First Nations' participation in international climate action*).

The thirtieth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 30) will be hosted in Belem, Brazil, over two weeks of November, marking 20 years since the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol and 10 years of adoption of the Paris Agreement. The success to date, unfortunately, has been minimal. The 2024 Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) Synthesis Report confirms that current national pledges will only reduce emissions by 2.6% by 2030 compared to 2019 levels – nowhere near the 43% cut needed to limit warming to 1.5% of the Paris Agreement ¹. 2024 was also the warmest year on record globally, being the first calendar year that the average global temperature exceeded 1.5°C above its pre-industrial level. The State of the Global Climate Report, produced by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), confirmed 2024 as the warmest year on record, and the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide has reached its highest level in the last 800,000 years. A similar story exists in Canada, where northern regions have been experiencing record high temperature increases of ~2.3 °C since 1948, warming at roughly three times the global average ².

1 UNFCCC. 2024 NDC Synthesis Report: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/nationally-determined-contributions-ndcs/2024-ndc-synthesis-report>.

2 Government of Canada. Canada's Changing Climate Report, Chapter 4: Temperature and Precipitation Across Canada: <https://natural-resources.canada.ca/sites/www.nrcan.gc.ca/files/energy/Climate-change/pdf/CCCR-Chapter4-TemperatureAndPrecipitationAcrossCanada.pdf>



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2. First Nations Climate Solutions

In contrast to this bleak picture, many First Nations have been advancing innovative climate solutions at all levels. The 2023 AFN National Climate Strategy ³, for example, organizes actionable items in seven priority areas in order to serve as an enabling document that creates space for First Nations at all levels of government. This strategy embraces a fundamentally different approach to climate action – one grounded in First Nations worldviews ⁴. It elevates rights-based governance, self-determination, and First Nations' knowledge systems as a central pathway to climate resilience. To support implementation of the Strategy, the AFN has been hosting dedicated webinar sessions to design a national First Nations Climate Action Toolkit: an evergreen document intended to support First Nations in developing their own climate strategy and action plans. The toolkit will focus on uplifting First Nations-led and solution-oriented climate action; emphasize practical support to First Nations to develop climate strategies that embed gender equity, accessibility, youth leadership, and First Nations priorities; and weave together tools, resources, and guidance to emphasize First Nations-led implementation.

We are at a critical global turning point, and we must make choices that will benefit our great-grandchildren and great, great-grandchildren. As the late Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission ⁵, would ask, "Have we been good relatives to future generations?" Such a question aligns with the ambitious language of the COP 30 Presidency and their commitments to a global "mutirão"⁶. In their fifth letter to the global community, COP 30 President Designate Ambassador André Corrêa do Lago' highlighted the need for ambitious, concrete action, calling for "a 're-enchantment,' what we Indigenous women in Brasil call reforesting the minds—the ability to see life in its fullness and harmony, beyond metrics and reports". First Nations from coast to coast to coast are ready to build and revitalize relationships with Indigenous Peoples all over the world to uplift our knowledge systems for the betterment of all peoples.

Over the last eight years, the AFN has developed in collaboration with First Nations the Climate Lens to illustrate how the experiences and interconnections of First Nations cannot be overlooked when contemplating climate-related solutions for (or by) First Nations. **Figure 1** shows the Climate Lens' bringing together four concentric circles – Natural Law, Actions, Impacts, and Context—to bring into focus what First Nations climate solutions look like.

3 The AFN National Climate Strategy found here: <https://afn.bynder.com/m/77556e1d9da51db7/original/2023-Climate-Strategy-Report.pdf>

4 AFN statements found here: https://www.pentictonherald.ca/spare_news/article_44ee69db-e0eb-5679-b01c-4f6c2c1bd00e.html

5 The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established under the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. Travelling across the country to hear from Survivors of Residential School, their families, members of the communities, and former staff. In June 2015, the Commission released 94 "Calls to Action" to address the legacy of residential schools and move forward with reconciliation: [Calls to Action English2.pdf](#)

6 Motirão, in Tupi-Guarani language, refers to a community coming together to work on a shared task, whether harvesting, building, or supporting one another. The COP 30 Presidency has used this to call for global "mutirão" against climate change, a global effort of cooperation among peoples for the progress of humanity.



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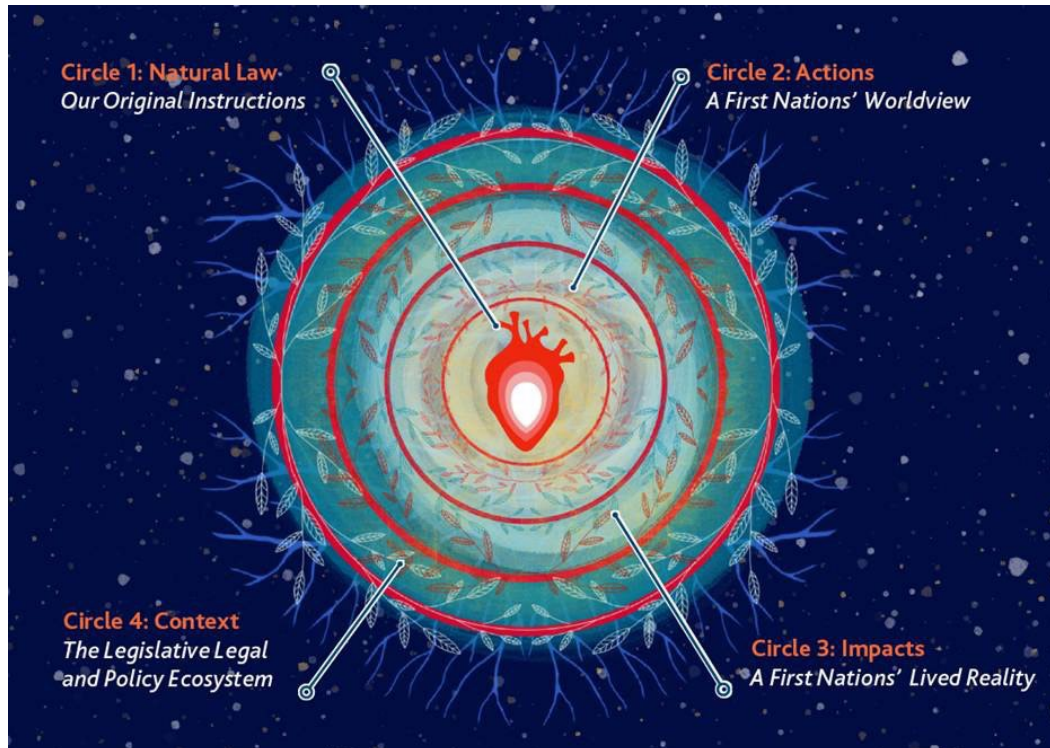


Figure 1. First Nations Climate Lens: Eruoma Awashish prepared this image. Eruoma is an Atikamekw Nehirowisiw mother and artist who is committed to her nation. She works in a variety of mediums, including painting, installation, performance, video, silkscreening and traditional dance. Awashish grew up in the community of Opijciwan. She is now established in Pekuakami (Lac-Saint-Jean), and her studio is located in the Innu community of Mashteuiatsh. She holds an interdisciplinary Bachelor of Arts from the University of Quebec at Chicoutimi.

A full description of the Climate Lens is outlined in AFN's National Climate Strategy; the four circles represent the following:

- **Circle 1 – Natural Law: Our Original Instructions:** Natural Law is a set of laws that originate directly from the Creator, based in our diverse languages, oral histories, and ceremonies, to govern how we must interact with the Land, Water, Air, and more-than-human relatives to ensure balance and reciprocity.
- **Circle 2 – Action: A First Nations' Worldview:** First Nations-led solutions are multidimensional, interrelated, interconnected, and grounded in First Nations spiritualities, legal systems, knowledges, languages, and governance. We understand that we are one with the Land, Water, and Air.
- **Circle 3 – Impacts: The First Nations' Lived Reality:** In Canada, climate conversations often disregard the historical legacy of colonization which impacts the lived reality of First Nations today. This must be understood and incorporated into analyses of the distribution and experience of climate-related impacts, which cannot be separated from the broader project of First Nations self-determination and reconciliation.
- **Circle 4 – Context: The Legislative, Legal and Policy Ecosystem:** For First Nations, climate action is a rights- and Inherent responsibilities- based activity to be established, mandated, and implemented within First Nations governance, and working in parallel with colonial legislative, legal, and policy contexts at the federal, provincial, territorial, and international level.



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2.1. Applying the First Nations Climate Lens to the Global Goal on Adaptation

Over the last three COPs (COP 27, COP 28, and COP 29), we have applied the Climate Lens to key policy discussions occurring at the annual meeting. At COP 29, for example, our position paper, [Embedding First Nations Climate Leadership at COP 29](#), outlined the negotiation–, and finalization–, of the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG), highlighting two main areas for opportunity: i) the need for a minimum, enabling text to promote direct partnership with First Nations, and Indigenous Peoples from the seven UN socio-cultural regions; and ii) that the NCQG must take Parties’ obligations to human rights and the rights of Indigenous People seriously. Given the year’s focus on the Global Goal on Adaptation and building on the lessons from the past three years (Box 1), we turn our attention to the negotiation, and finalization of the indicators intended to track progress related to global adaptation action.

First, the conceptualization of adaptation used within the UNFCCC is inconsistent with First Nation worldviews. First Nations understand adaptation as structurally determined – the adaptive capacity of First Nations is intertwined with increased sensitivity and exposure to climate risks and extreme weather. This increased sensitivity and exposure is not innate to First Nations; rather it is the product of the historical and contemporary legacy of colonization in every aspect of First Nation lives, including the infrastructure gap, inequitable health and well-being outcomes, and continued efforts to dispossess First Nations from their homelands. An application of the Climate Lens to adaptation (and adaptation indicators) would enable a deeper engagement with the structural determinants of adaptation, beginning with building a shared understanding of adaptation, and based on that shared understanding, determine appropriate actions and indicators. This deeper conversation is lacking in the current adaptation indicators and may be detrimental to fully understanding the factors that support, or prevent, meaningful adaptation action and tracking. It also risks locking First Nations in an ontological path of dependency that forces the depth and breadth of First Nations knowledge systems to ‘fit’ into mainstream climate solutions.

Second, the clear absence of ethical engagement with First Nations knowledge systems within the near finalized list of indicators runs contrary to the growing recognition of the distinct role of Indigenous Peoples and their knowledge systems. Without adopting a structural determinants approach to adaptation, the wholistic First Nations understanding of the interconnection between humans and the natural world — as being *one with the Land, Water, and Air of our homelands*, rather than compartmentalized units apart from nature — remains completely absent. This omission not only limits the integrity of the Global Goal but also undermines the effectiveness of adaptation strategies that require relational and place-based perspectives. A Climate Lens review of each indicator could propose more meaningful integration of First Nations knowledge systems, ensuring that measures of adaptation are not only technically sound, but also ethically grounded and culturally relevant. Until such engagement occurs, the indicators cannot be considered comprehensive, credible, or fully aligned with principles of justice and reconciliation.

Third, the absence of any engagement with the rights of Indigenous Peoples risks framing adaptation action as a technocratic exercise devoid of any deeper implications on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. By contrast, First Nations continue to experience the negative repercussions of ‘maladaptation’, such as the displacement of First Nations by diverting a flooding Lake Winnipeg away from the urban centre. Clearly, the list of indicators (and broader action on adaptation) must take Parties’ obligations to human rights and the rights of Indigenous



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Peoples seriously, in alignment with the minimum standards of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration). Canada, as one of the only countries with legislated consideration of the UN Declaration (the UN Declaration Act) could support the need to ensure adaptation is not separated from the required implementation of those minimum standards.

Box 1: Highlights from applications of the First Nations Climate Lens to discussions at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

COP 27 (Sharm El-Sheikh): Confronting the mitigation- adaptation dichotomy

Given the growing commitments on net-zero, net-zero must not be interpreted as an end goal, rather, it must be conceptualized as a process leading to a just, equitable, and resilient future for our future generations.

Given the interconnections between the sectors and systems upon which First Nations rely, this false dichotomy must be challenged to enable an acknowledgement of wholistic, integrated, and systems-based solutions that must address the existential threat that is climate change.

COP 28 (Dubai): Global Stocktake

The GST process failed to engage in deeper discussions, locking in an ontological path of dependency that forces First Nations–, and Indigenous Peoples–, to ‘fit’ or be ignored into mainstream climate solutions.

The next GST must take Parties’ obligations to human rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples seriously. In alignment with the minimum standards of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration).

A limited process and scope of the GST will influence future stocktaking discussions. To this end, ‘getting it right’ here could help to support the inclusion of First Nations thinking and leadership into the future.

COP 29 (Baku): New Collective Quantified Goal

To this end, ‘getting it right’ in the NCQG negotiations would create new windows of direct access, or at minimum enabling text, to be elaborated in direct partnership with First Nations–, and Indigenous Peoples from the seven UN socio-cultural regions.

An application of the Climate Lens shows us that the experiences of colonized Nations are similar and require an additional layer of analysis in climate financing regimes.

The NCQG must take Parties’ obligations to human rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples seriously in alignment with the minimum standards of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration).



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3. Recommendations for COP 30

The Climate Lens brings into focus these issues and conversations, and with its application can create space and support First Nations in advancing transformative and systemic changes. In alignment with the Climate Lens, we proposed three areas of recommendations for COP 30 in Belem, Brazil.

3.1. Leverage the First Nations Climate Lens to create space for Indigenous Peoples' governance, rights, and knowledge systems within all areas of the UNFCCC.

The Climate Lens calls for transformative change in how climate action is framed, managed, and implemented. It challenges the extractive narrative of technological fixes and market-driven responses. Instead the Lens centers First Nations' rights, self-determination, and knowledge systems as a just and effective climate solution. In alignment with the Climate lens, we offer the following key recommendations:

- **3.1.1.** Strong safeguards for human rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples, including those re-affirmed in the UN Declaration, are embedded in operative text concerning the Mitigation Work Programme, the Baku to Belem Roadmap, Just Transition Workplan, and other relevant negotiations, including any Presidency-led Cover Text.
- **3.1.2.** Review all Action Areas, including the Global Ethical Stocktake, through the First Nations Climate Lens, considering the minimum standards of the UN Declaration, First Nations Inherent and Treaty rights, and Seven Generations thinking.
- **3.1.3.** Provide First Nations, and other Indigenous Peoples in the Global North, direct access to funds from the Baku-Belem Roadmap and New Collective Quantified Goal through their own representative institutions/ governments.

3.2. Create concrete opportunities for the ethical and equitable engagement of First Nations including First Nations youth, to demonstrate climate leadership.

Since the launch of the AFN National Climate Strategy, intergenerational knowledge transfer has been an essential part of continuing the advocacy of climate action. As such, we recommend the following:

- **3.2.1.** Fully implement the [AFN's Position Paper on the Terminology "Indigenous Peoples and local communities"](#) to immediately stop the practice of combining Indigenous Peoples and the term 'local communities' and reaffirm the distinct status and rights of First Nations–, in all UNFCCC documents and decisions.⁷
- **3.2.2.** Urge Parties to provide stable and ongoing resources to support the implementation of the Baku workplan of the Local Communities Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP), including for Knowledge Holders participation in the Annual Gathering, Regional Gathering, and the Seven Generations Roundtable.

⁷ For example, Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy provides this delineation clearly: "In the Canadian context, "Indigenous Peoples" have specific and distinct rights, whereas "local communities" does not exist as a formal or legal term. As such, the 2030 Strategy highlights Indigenous Peoples". The full strategy can be found here: [Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy: Halting and Reversing Biodiversity Loss in Canada - Canada.ca](#)



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- **3.2.3.** All levels of government, including the UNFCCC, must work directly, and in full partnership with First Nations rights- and title- holders, to implement self-determined First Nations climate priorities–, including, but not limited to, those outlined in the AFN National Climate Strategy.
- **3.2.4.** Provide sufficient and sustainable funding to First Nations to implement their own strategies, including participating in the UNFCCC.

3.3. Take urgent and transformative climate action in line with the AFN National Climate Strategy.

While Canada submitted a 2035 NDC setting a target of 45-50% below 2005 levels by 2050⁸, current action will fall far short of this. Recent calculations from the [Early Estimate of National Emissions](#) (EENE) have indicated that Canada's emission reductions have flatlined, and any expected decrease from the consumer carbon price can no longer be considered. Given Prime Minister Carney's commitments to climate action, Canada must ensure adherence to its' identified targets, grounded in the leadership of First Nations, who made explicit calls for 60% below 2010 by 2030. Furthermore, given this is a year for Parties to submit updated NDCs, it is time that they act meaningfully on climate action–, and champion the broader goal of implementing Indigenous systems across UNFCCC party actions and climate policy remains unfulfilled.

- **3.3.1.** All Parties must update their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in line with the First Nations-in-Assembly Declaration of a First Nations Climate Emergency to keep global warming below 1.5°C.
- **3.3.2.** Call on the UNFCCC, in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples, to update the Annual NDC Synthesis Report to reflect the references to Indigenous Peoples and their knowledge systems, in alignment with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- **3.3.2.** Develop clear operational guidance for the UNFCCC to engage First Nations knowledge systems ethically and equitably in all elements of discussion to inform the conceptualization of the drivers of the climate crisis, emission reduction targets, adaptation, loss and damage, and other climate solutions.

4. Conclusion

This document provides key recommendations to support First Nation self-determination at the UNFCCC and build on the three decades of advocacy from First Nations since the first Rio Summit. In the above, we applied the Climate Lens to the indicators associated with the Global Goal on Adaptation, and then shared recommendations based on three broad categories.

8 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan. Government of Canada. Retrieved from: https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2022/eccc/En4-460-2022-eng.pdf.