



Twenty years. That's how long we have both petitioned the world community to save our lands and peoples. We have done so in every conceivable manner and with ever-increasing urgency. Twenty years ago, when we began to experience climate change in our lands and communities, we began to worry that our children would no longer grow up in a safe and nurturing environment. We worried too that our ancient cultures, deeply connected to our lands, might not survive into future generations. Today, our children now experience those changes with us every day, and join in the appeal for future generations.

It is hard to imagine us coming from more different backgrounds: one from a balmy archipelago in the Indian Ocean and the other from the chilly expanse of the northern tundra. Yet today we join with our brothers and sisters from other islands and polar regions through Many Strong Voices — a network of individuals and communities in the Arctic and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) connecting for strategic action on climate change mitigation and adaptation. We reiterate our unequivocal appeal: The world must take action now to stop climate change and address the damage already done.

The world will gather in Copenhagen over the next two weeks at the single most decisive moment yet for action on climate change. We cannot afford to squander this opportunity.

As climate science has advanced, we now know the consequences of the world's unwillingness to act. Even once the world agrees to stabilize and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, warming from gases already in the atmosphere will tragically affect the most vulnerable regions of our planet. Sadly, as we have seen recently in places such as the Pacific island of Kiribati and the Alaskan community of Shishmaref, it may already be too late.

Our peoples have overcome innumerable challenges to thrive in our Arctic and island communities for hundreds and thousands of years. But recently, our elders have been warning us that the changes we witness are unprecedented in our histories. They see our ice melting and our seas rising and wonder if we might be

the last generation in the lands of our ancestors. If we lose our lands, we lose our cultures — some of the richest on earth.

While we and our colleagues will come to the table with a number of detailed proposals, our primary objectives are clear: 1) reduce global emissions to avoid catastrophic warming while recognizing common but differentiated responsibilities between nations; 2) ensure adequate adaptation measures are taken in areas facing the adverse impacts of climate change now and in the future; and 3) include human rights protections in the final agreement.

If we can achieve these goals, Copenhagen will mark a watershed in humankind's ability to look beyond immediate and parochial interests and to reconnect as a shared humanity.

As we join other representatives of the peoples of the Arctic and the small island developing states in Copenhagen the next two weeks to do our part, the eyes of our peoples will be on us and the deliberations as never before. It is our hope that, twenty years after the negotiations began, our world will take bold, courageous action to prevent further damage to its islands and its Arctic, and to spare other regions from a similar fate.

Sheila Watt-Cloutier
Inuit Activist
2007 Nobel Peace Prize Nominee

Ambassador Ronny Jumeau
UN Permanent Representative
Government of Seychelles

For more information or additional author background, please contact:

Lance Laack
Many Strong Voices
Copenhagen mobile: +45 53 94 10 53
Email: lance.laack@gmail.com