

‘Don’t Take Our Voices Away’

A role play on the Indigenous Peoples’ Global Summit on Climate Change

BY JULIE TREICK O’NEILL AND TIM SWINEHART

ON THE DEC. 8 BROADCAST OF *DEMOCRACY NOW!*, Amy Goodman asked her guest, 15-year-old Mohamed Axam Maumoon, youth ambassador from the Maldives Islands to the U.N. climate talks in Copenhagen, for a message to young people everywhere about what climate change meant to him. Without hesitation, Axam turned to the camera and asked, “Would you commit murder . . . even while we are begging for mercy and begging for you to stop what you’re doing, change your ways, and let our children see the future that we want to build for them?”

What does it mean to take Axam’s question seriously? For many of us in the wealthy and

so-called “developed” countries of the world, it means learning about the very real and life-threatening ways that climate change is affecting some of the world’s poorest populations. From the rapidly submerging islands of the Maldives, Kiribati, and Tuvalu, to the melting permafrost in native lands across the Arctic, indigenous peoples around the world are confronting some of the worst effects of the climate crisis, despite having done so little to cause it. Axam’s question prompts us to confront the injustice of a situation in which the wealthiest 20 percent of the world’s population has been responsible for more than 60 percent of global warming emissions.



Kari Koch

The global peasant movement, La Vía Campesina, marches at the 2010 climate change summit in Cancun, Mexico, promoting the voices of indigenous people throughout the world.

The Indigenous Peoples' Climate Summit role play grew out of the Portland Area Rethinking Schools Earth in Crisis Curriculum Workgroup and the Oregon Writing Project. It was designed to introduce students to the broad injustice of the climate crisis and to familiarize them with some of the specific issues faced by different indigenous groups around the world as they confront climate change. The role play was inspired by the actual Indigenous Peoples' Global Summit on Climate Change, held in Anchorage, Alaska, in April 2009, when representatives from around the world exchanged experiences and observations from the front lines of climate change and agreed on a unified strategy for leading a worldwide campaign. The Anchorage Summit highlighted how indigenous peoples are combining traditional knowledge with new practices to adapt to climatic changes, and the important role that indigenous perspectives can play as the rest of the world attempts to respond and adapt to the realities of a quickly changing climate.

We wanted to give our global studies students—9th graders at Lincoln High School, a large public school serving Portland's predominantly white, relatively prosperous west side—the opportunity to educate one another about how indigenous peoples are confronting the effects of climate change. (Although we were not team teaching, we met daily to plan the unit and to share student responses.) Following the example of the Anchorage Summit, we wanted to model a collaborative decision-making process and give voice to the concerns and solutions of groups who are often left out of international climate talks. (Even the name of the most prominent climate monitoring organization, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, marginalizes indigenous peoples, who rarely have their own national governments.) So we developed a role play in which students are divided into small groups, each of which represents an indigenous

group that attended the Anchorage Summit. We wrote a profile sheet for each group that details how they are being affected by climate change. The groups have an opportunity to discuss their own situation, teach and learn from the other groups, and, finally, agree on a common list of demands.

The role play includes six groups: the Dine (Navajo), Yup'ik (Alaska Native), the Bambara of sub-Saharan Africa, and indigenous groups from Kiribati (central Pacific islands), the Caribbean, and the Amazon—peoples most of our students knew nothing about. In each of the roles, indigenous people, as farmers or hunter-gatherers with intimate ties to the land, are validated and honored as legitimate observers to climate change.

Many nature shows, environmental groups, and even our own Oregon Zoo have highlighted the plight of the polar bear; and, like a word-association test, when we first brought up the issue of climate change in class, it was inevitably followed by “those poor bears” comments from our stu-

dents. We built on that association by putting it in a larger perspective, with an exploration of the overall environmental consequences of climate change and the impact of these changes on the survival of peoples and cultures. For example, the Yup'ik role includes the following passage:

The permafrost is melting—and that means your way of life is threatened. You depend on hunting and fishing walrus, seals, and salmon. These days, autumn freeze-up occurs up to a month later than usual and the spring thaw seems earlier every year. The multi-year sea-ice is smaller, and now drifts far from your community in the spring, taking with it the seals upon which your community relies for food. In the winter the sea-ice is thin and broken, making travel dangerous for even the most experienced hunters. In the fall, storms have become more

We want students to recognize the urgency and intimacy of climate change for many of the world's people.

frequent and severe, making boating difficult. Thunder and lightning have been seen for the first time.

In Portland we, too, deal with climate change issues. The glaciers on Mt. Hood are receding, threatening water supplies in the Hood River Valley and the apples, pears, and cherries the region provides. Like climate change itself, this feels abstract to many of our students, for whom food comes from the store, and climate change happens somewhere else. The situations presented in the roles confront students with people for whom climate change is much more pressing; we want students to recognize the urgency and intimacy of climate change for many of the world's people. As the Bambara role, from sub-Saharan Africa, illustrates:

The Sahara Desert is growing—you know, because you've seen it with your own eyes. Some measurements show the desert growing by up to 30 miles per year, taking over grasslands and trees in its path. It's starting to feel like you might be next. Your ancestors have lived near the desert for hundreds of years, farming special varieties of maize, millet, and sorghum adapted to the warm temperatures and dry climate of your homeland. But as temperatures all over sub-Saharan Africa get warmer, farming that was already difficult to begin with has gotten much worse. . . .

Learning to Empathize

As we distributed the roles to our students, we asked them to read each role carefully, highlight-

ing information they felt was vital to understanding the particular climate challenges presented by their characters. The roles are packed with information, so we asked students to read them aloud in small groups and then discuss the situations confronting their groups.

"This sucks—we are *dying!*" Jeyonna announced to the rest of the Bambara convened around her. The discussion questions we distributed to the six groups centered on two points: First, what did the group need the rest of the world to know about how climate change is affecting their

region? Second, what actions—in order of priority—would they like to see the world take to address the problems facing indigenous peoples as a result of climate change?

"What we need is nuclear power!" Quinn announced confidently to no

one in particular, as the class settled into their task.

"If you want it so bad, you go work in the mines," Amanda countered as a Dine. "If there are nuclear reactors," she explained, "you have to live with the waste."

The roles deal not only with how climate change affects indigenous peoples but also with the impact of supposed alternatives—what's called "mitigation" in climate change jargon. For example, as the Dine role explains to students:

Farming is not the only way that the Dine are connected to climate change. As energy companies look for ways to make electricity that release lower greenhouse gas emissions, some people are talking about nuclear power as a perfect solution to our climate problems. They say that nuclear power can produce all the electricity we need, and not



Due to the melting of the permafrost, many homes in Kwigillingok, Alaska, are beginning to sink.

Lauren McLanahan

release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

But where is the uranium that fuels the nuclear power plants mined? From your land. While Dine people are some of the poorest in the United States, the Dine land is rich with uranium resources. You grew up hearing stories of the Dine men who worked in the yellowcake uranium mines, from the 1940s to the 1980s. You want others to hear these stories about family and friends who came home each day with clothes covered in yellow uranium dust. The companies that ran the mines told workers not to worry about the dust—that it was safe—but people now know that the mines exposed workers and their families to high levels of radiation. . . .

So indigenous peoples need to speak with one voice and say that not only do we have to support real solutions to climate change, we have to oppose false solutions—like nuclear power that just leads to more poisoning of indigenous people.

Finding “One Voice”

Finding this “one voice” was the impetus for the actual Anchorage summit. We wanted students to simulate the knowledge exchange and solidarity building that took place at that summit. Given the enormity of the climate crisis, it was important to us that our students encounter activists who were not defeated by these problems, but were knitting together alliances to address them.

So, for our next step, we explained to the students that they needed to find out about the situations of other groups, learn from their expertise, and look for commonalities, allies, and possible shared strategies for action. We asked students to choose half their group (generally three students) to move around the room as rovers/information sharers. The other half would serve as stationary representatives, receiving the groups moving around the room. In this way, in a class of 30 to 36 students, each group had the opportunity to interact with the other five groups in three rotations.

In their meetings with other groups, we asked students to focus first on the specific ways they were experiencing climate change in their homelands and how these changes were making life more difficult. (We provided graphic organizers so they could keep track of what they learned.) Many discovered common themes. “You have too much water and we don’t have any,” Jeyonna observed as a member of the Bambara. “Too bad we can’t just take your excess.”

“We can’t hunt; the ice is receding,” Jake added, speaking as an Alaska Native. “People are going hungry.”

“Us too! It’s food. We can’t grow it in the desert.”

Once they understood the problems faced by the other groups, we asked them to take notes on the actions the other groups proposed to deal with those issues: “We need to stop burning fossil fuels—50 percent within five years, 100 percent within 10.” “We need to mandate zero-emission power plants in all major cities.” “We need to stop cutting trees in the Amazon.” “We need to create more local economies.”

Representing indigenous cultures freed students from their own perspectives and their own limited experiences with climate change. It allowed them to suggest radical solutions, to envision a much different world than one ruled by the mighty dollar—because the true bottom line, for many of the roles, is that people and cultures are dying. As Usaia, reflecting on his role as a resident of Kiribati, wrote, “It affects a part of your body to see that the place you were born is going under water.”

Once they returned to their original groups, the students compared notes with other group members to prepare for the full summit by deciding on their top two priorities for action.

Building Consensus

To get the larger summit conversation started, we asked each group to propose one of their top two priorities. We wrote these on the board and the groups began negotiations. Students in each group had an opportunity to make the case

for their respective priority and then the class discussed its merit. We explained and instituted a consensus model for decision-making; this encouraged the kids to really evaluate the issues, looking for commonalities and opportunities for compromise. To infuse some tension in the deliberations and to make sure that students didn't simply produce a laundry list of possible strategies, we asked them to agree on the three most important action points. Although students struggled a little with the consensus approach, it encouraged them to think beyond their individual groups.

The most discussion centered on whether to pursue long-term or immediate actions. "People are starving right now!" Kristi reminded the summit, speaking as a Bambara. "People need to know that—it has to be a priority!"

"That's true," Helene agreed, as a member of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon, "but we also want a voice in the future. We need to be included and valued." Back and forth the discussion went as students suggested combining certain points, clarifying others, and eliminating a few.

Mary and Keegan, speaking as Dine representatives, made a convincing plea for moving toward more local economies. "We keep fighting with big mining companies who don't seem to care about us at all. All they want is our uranium, but my whole family is sick from mining," Mary argued.

"Yeah, that's why we need to let the rest of the world know that nuclear power is not a good solution to fossil fuels," Keegan added. "We should control what happens on Dine land, not some big company. We want to keep building solar panels on our land, not make more uranium mines."

Even if their arguments were simplistic at times, we were impressed that, within the first weeks of school, our 9th graders seemed fully invested in a multiday discussion that ranged from emissions reduction plans to limiting deforestation to funding programs to meet the needs of climate refugees.

In the end, most classes decided on a top action priority that combined the demands of some groups for wealthy countries to begin immediate and drastic reductions of greenhouse gas emissions with other groups' focus on proactive measures to help with a global transition to



Kari Koch

Indigenous people demonstrate at the 2010 climate change summit in Cancun.

renewable sources of energy. You could almost see the lightbulb go off above Sami's head when she raised her hand to suggest, "Why don't we combine the first three suggestions: stop using fossil fuels, cut emissions, and create more alternative energy? They all work toward the same goal, so we can see them as one action item. We can all support that, right?"

The Anchorage Declaration

After two days of intense conversation, we drew the summit to a close. Then we read the action items listed in the Anchorage Declaration from the actual Indigenous Peoples' Global Summit on Climate Change. Because students had invested so much energy in our own classroom discussions, they seemed eager to read the declaration from the real summit. For homework, we asked them to compare their list and the actual list, and to reflect on the similarities and differences.

In our discussion the next day, Keegan offered, "I think we did pretty well. I mean, our first action item is almost exactly the same as what they came up with at the real conference." When we asked

about anything that we might have missed in our discussion, Sonya pointed out that "number three of the Anchorage Declaration talks about the historical debt that wealthy nations owe because they have burned fossil fuels for the last 100 years. Even though this means we wouldn't be as wealthy, it seems fair since fossil fuels have made our lives so much better."

Another item from the Anchorage Declaration that didn't make it into our action items was a plan to send representatives from the Indigenous Summit to the U.N. Climate Conference in Copenhagen. The stated goals in the Anchorage Declaration are to recognize the importance of traditional knowledge, to include indigenous peoples' observations of climate change alongside those of scientists, and to fully include indigenous voices in international negotiations to create global climate change policy.

On the day President Obama was to receive his Nobel Peace Prize, a coalition of North American indigenous groups marched on the U.S. embassy in Copenhagen. Clayton Thomas-Muller from the Canadian-based Indigenous Tar Sands Campaign had this to say:

Photo courtesy of Lauren McLanahan and Kwigillingok High School students.



Kwigillingok, Alaska. Entire villages are being forced to relocate due to climate change.

So we're here in Copenhagen at the United Nations international climate negotiations . . . to say we want a just and clean future, a new economic paradigm that doesn't sacrifice our communities at the altar of irresponsible policies for the economic benefit of the select few who pull the economic strings.

As it turned out, the Copenhagen climate talks relied on a particularly exclusive, undemocratic process to produce the weak and unenforceable “accord” heralded as progress by Obama and the leaders of a handful of nations.

But even if indigenous voices were not given a prominent official role in the U.N. climate talks, they did play a crucial role in the protests in the streets of Copenhagen and the incredible gathering of thousands of civil society groups that came to Denmark to advocate for a fair and just climate treaty. By December, our classes had moved on to new topics, but as we took time out to watch some of the coverage of the Copenhagen talks on *Democracy Now!*, students recalled their connections to the indigenous leaders they saw on the screen—the real people on whom their roles had been based.

“My name is Johnson Cerda. I am a Quechua Indian from the Ecuadorian Amazon, and I grew up in the rainforest.”

“That’s me!” Helene shouted as Cerda continued:

We are here because we understand that . . . in the climate negotiation, we need at least to put our voice first. Second, we want to insert some safeguards for indigenous peoples. And the third thing is that we need also to say here that we have knowledge, and we can share our knowledge.

As we were watching the indigenous activists, I (Julie) leaned over and whispered to Amanda Henderson, who is a member of the Warm Springs tribe of Central Oregon, “That might be you up there one day.” As we smiled at each other, I knew it was worth taking a day away from our current unit to watch the Copenhagen coverage. But I was unprepared when she came to class the next day and handed me this poem:

*The quietest voices
Have the loudest meaning
Every word said is like
An earthquake.
It sends a big movement
It moves the biggest barriers down
It can open a new state of mind.
The quietest voices
Can join and become
A million voices.
For what we say can
Be pushed aside
Forgot about.
But when we come together,
We are heard
We do count
We are ready to stand up
We won't take no for an answer
We will speak until
Everyone hears us
We will not be quiet anymore
We are important
We do count.
Don't take our voices away.*

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Indigenous Peoples' Global Summit on Climate Change*

Anchorage, Alaska

WELCOME PEOPLE OF THE ARCTIC, of the Americas, of the Pacific, of Africa, of the Caribbean, to the Indigenous Peoples' Global Summit on Climate Change. We thank the Ahtna and the Dena'ina Athabascan Peoples in whose lands we are gathered.

Mother Earth is no longer in a period of climate change, but in climate crisis. Rising oceans, thawing permafrost, larger storms, expanding deserts, dying coral reefs, and declining forests threaten the stability of Indigenous Peoples around the world.

While the wealthier nations of the world debate the best way to limit the effects of climate change in the future, we face the immediate destruction of our homes, our lands, our traditions, and our cultures. As Patricia Cochran, chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council said, "Indigenous peoples have contributed the least to the global problem of climate change, but will almost certainly bear the greatest brunt of its impact."

We meet here today because we will not stand by and witness the destruction of our way of life. We represent only a few of the 5,000 groups of Indigenous Peoples in more than 70 countries. Together we have a global population of 350 million, representing about 6 percent of humanity.

We have persisted through 500 years of invasion, genocide, land theft, and now environmental destruction—we will outlast this threat as well.

We honor our solidarity as Indigenous Peoples living in areas that are the most vulnerable to the impacts and root causes of climate change. We reaffirm the unbreakable and sacred connection between land, air, water, oceans, forests, sea ice, plants, animals and our human communities as the material and spiritual basis for our existence.

In fact, the world desperately needs the wisdom of indigenous perspectives, perhaps now more than ever. Because of our long cultural and spiritual connection to the land, oceans, and wildlife, Indigenous Peoples have a lot to offer the rest of the world as it considers how best to deal with the climate crisis.

The goal of this Summit is to develop a list of action items to present to the rest of the world at the United Nations climate change treaty meeting, held in Copenhagen this December. Because of the stakes posed by climate change, the Copenhagen meeting has been called the most important global gathering in human history, so it is essential that Indigenous Peoples be given full participation. Today we start that process of participation.

*Adapted from the original, www.indigenoussummit.com

Indigenous Peoples' Global Summit on Climate Change

Discussion Questions

From the perspective of your role, answer the questions below. You will need to talk with other groups during negotiations in order to find information to questions that are not answered in your own role description.

1. What do you want the rest of the world to know about how climate change is affecting you and other Indigenous Peoples?
2. What actions would you like to see the rest of the world take to address the problems facing Indigenous Peoples as a result of climate change? *Put these in order of priority.*
3. What concerns do you have about diminishing food supplies or your people's ability to feed yourselves in the future as a result of climate change?
4. If climate change forces Indigenous People to migrate from your homelands (due to rising sea levels, melting permafrost, disappearing water supplies, etc.), how should the rest of the world respond to these climate change refugees?

Kiribati People— Pacific Islands

YOU REPRESENT THE PEOPLE of Kiribati (pronounced KEER-ih-bahs), a group of islands located in the tropical Pacific Ocean, to the north and east of Australia. The chain of 32 islands is home to more than 100,000 people, all of whom live only a few feet above sea level.

Kiribati is expected to be one the world's first countries to lose its territory as a result of sea level rise from global climate change. Within the last 10 years, two of the smallest islands have already disappeared underwater. As Americans debate whether rising sea levels will someday affect cities like New York and San Francisco, you're watching the effects right outside your front door. This is not some future scenario for the people of Kiribati; your neighbor must decide soon whether or not to move her grandmother's grave when the rising seas force her to move her home.

Your ancestors have lived here for thousands of years, but now you might lose your home because of a problem that you didn't cause. But you know who's to blame. People in the wealthy countries of Europe and the United States have caused greenhouse gases to increase in the atmosphere, by burning so many fossil fuels, like coal, oil, and natural gas, for the last 200 years. These people claim the right to drive their cars, but how can this compare to your right to a secure home? These wealthy countries must immediately begin to dramatically reduce their use of fossil fuels.

As sea levels rise, salt water from the ocean has polluted the freshwater sources that the people and plants of Kiribati depend on for survival. As a symbol of things to come, one Kiribati island, Tepuka Savilivili, no longer has any coconut trees—killed off by increasing levels of salt water in the ground. Coconut trees are the backbone of traditional Kiribati culture, ranging in use from food to building

materials. Because of its importance, your people refer to it as “the tree of life.”

Kiribati's land and coconut trees are not the only things threatened by climate change—the traditional island culture is also at risk of disappearing with the rising ocean. For thousands of years, your ancestors have lived here, building their culture in relationship with the natural environment. If you are forced to leave Kiribati, forced to migrate to Australia or New Zealand, certain parts of Kiribati culture will be lost forever. This is why many Kiribati will choose not to leave their homes.

However, Kiribati president Anote Tong is already planning for the migration of your people. Here is part of an address he gave to the United Nations last year:

Ultimately, low-lying island countries like Kiribati will have to face up to the reality of their islands being unable to support life, and plan accordingly. The relocation of the 100,000 people of Kiribati cannot be done overnight. It requires long-term forward planning and the sooner we act, the less stressful and the less painful it would be for all concerned. We must provide them with the education and training to make them competitive and marketable in international labor markets. This strategy provides our people with an option so that when they choose to migrate, they will migrate on merit and with dignity. They will be received by their adopted countries not as burdens, but as worthwhile members of the community.

But so far, the so-called “developed” nations have agreed to no plan for climate refugee migration. Do they expect you to drown in the ocean as they continue to pollute the atmosphere?

Yup'ik People

YOU ARE YUP'IK ESKIMO and live in the Arctic. You have a close relationship with nature and notice even small changes in the environment. Recently, you have been very worried because the climate has become unpredictable and the landscape has changed.

The permafrost is melting—and that means your way of life is threatened. You depend on hunting and fishing walrus, seals, and salmon. These days, autumn freeze-up occurs up to a month later than usual and the spring thaw seems earlier every year. The multiyear sea ice is smaller, and now drifts far from your community in the spring, taking with it the seals upon which your community relies for food. In the winter the sea ice is thin and broken, making travel dangerous for even the most experienced hunters. In the fall, storms have become more frequent and severe, making boating difficult. Thunder and lightning have been seen for the first time.

Hotter weather in the summer is melting the permafrost and causing large-scale slumping on the coastline and along the shores of inland lakes. The melting has already caused one inland lake near you to drain into the ocean, killing the freshwater fish. Even the foundations under buildings are shifting.

The village of Newtok, about 800 kilometers west of Anchorage, is one of several Yup'ik villages in need of relocation due to climate change. Because of higher average temperatures, intensifying river flow and melting permafrost are destroying homes and infrastructure. More than 300 residents have been forced to relocate to a higher site 15 kilometers west on Nelson Island. This will cost tens of millions of dollars. What will become of your people? And why should your people suffer so that other nations can continue burning more and more coal and oil and living comfortably? This is so unfair.

The Arctic is warming at twice the rate of the rest of the world. Scientists think that summer ice could vanish in the next 10 to 20 years. Oil companies say that one quarter of the earth's untapped fossil fuels, including 375 billion barrels of oil, lie beneath the Arctic. They can't wait for the ice to melt. They call this the new "black gold rush." So as your people try to hang on to your land and culture, oil companies profit from your suffering and become richer and richer.

It's urgent that you join with other Indigenous Peoples to stop climate change and to demand justice for your people.

Taino, Caribs, Arawaks

Indigenous Peoples in the Caribbean

MORE THAN 500 YEARS AGO, your ancestors greeted the first European in the Americas: Christopher Columbus. Columbus called you “the best people in the world.” He also took hundreds of you as slaves and sent you to Spain. In your own land, he forced you to hunt for gold and to work on plantations. Today, the wealthy countries of the world continue to exploit your people, but in different ways. Now, because of their greenhouse gas pollution from their cars, and coal plants, and deforestation, they are changing the climate, and threatening your way of life.

Coral reefs are often referred to as “rainforests of the sea.” Home to more than 25 percent of all marine species, reefs are highly biologically diverse. They provide a habitat and breeding ground for local and commercially important species of fish, shrimp, and lobsters. Reefs also act as natural buffers, protecting vulnerable coastal areas from bearing the full brunt of storms. An analysis conducted between 1969 and 2008 showed the most complex types of reef had been virtually wiped out across the entire Caribbean.

Coral reefs currently face two major—and growing—threats:

Acidification: The oceans are a major carbon sink, absorbing between 30 and 50 percent of all human-created CO₂ emissions. Scientists project that the pH of the ocean will drop from 8.2 (its preindustrial level) to 7.8, by the next century. This would be the largest such change in more than 20 million years. Several studies have suggested that reef-forming coral cannot survive at pH levels less than 7.6.

Coral bleaching: The harm to Caribbean reefs is not only linked to climate change; a second

period of coral destruction is now under way. Other human impacts such as overfishing and coastal development cause the tiny organisms that build the coral reefs to become stressed and abandon their colonies, resulting in “coral bleaching.” Bleached corals are weaker and more prone to disease. The combination of increased sea surface temperatures and ocean acidification has led to mass bleaching, with temperature increases as low as 1°C. With increases of 2°C to 3°C, the corals may die.

For thousands of years before Columbus accidentally bumped into your islands, the sea provided life for your people. And Columbus’s ancestors continue to find ways to harm your people. You need to tell the wealthy countries that we all have to share this world, that they have no right to destroy the oceans through greenhouse gas pollution.

And it’s not just the oceans. Scientists reported in a new article in *Nature* magazine that hurricanes in the Atlantic are more frequent than at any time in the last 1,000 years. Other scientists say that as the earth warms, along with more severe hurricanes in the Caribbean, you will experience more summer droughts. Another scientific report just said that because of climate change, 56 different bird species in the Caribbean are threatened. Well, it’s good to have the scientists trying to figure out what’s happening, but you know that things are getting worse from your own oral traditions and from how close to the land and sea you have always lived.

Indigenous elders have been warning about these changes for decades. It’s time for the world to stop ignoring the lives—and the wisdom—of Indigenous Peoples.

Bambara People— Sub-Saharan Africa

THE SAHARA DESERT IS GROWING—you know, because you've seen it with your own eyes. Some measurements show the desert growing by up to 30 miles per year, taking over grasslands and trees in its path. It's starting to feel like you might be next. Your ancestors have lived near the desert for hundreds of years, farming special varieties of maize, millet, and sorghum adapted to the warm temperatures and dry climate of your homeland. But as temperatures all over sub-Saharan Africa get warmer, farming that was already difficult to begin with has gotten much worse.

The Bambara live in countries like Mali, Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Niger—all countries that were named in a recent study that warned of the challenges facing African farmers as temperatures increase from global warming. The best estimates are for temperatures to rise five degrees Fahrenheit by 2100, but many scientists now say this is too optimistic, and that warming might be closer to 10 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century.

The Bambara have been good at adapting to the changing climate of the sub-Saharan region, but these changes may be insurmountable. Even the hardiest varieties of the region's three main crops—maize, millet, and sorghum—would probably not tolerate the conditions forecast for the coming decades. Droughts in the 1970s and 1980s killed 100,000 people in the region, but this would be much worse. Without immediate

solutions, food security across all of Africa could be threatened.

Malnutrition has become more common among your people. It is common to see children with a reddish fuzz on top of their heads—a sign of malnutrition. Half the Bambara children die before their first birthday. For some, the climate crisis is in the future, but for your people it is happening *now*. Poverty and malnutrition have many causes, but the changing climate is a big one.

More than 40 percent of Africa's population lives on less than a dollar a day, and 70 percent of these poor are located in rural areas and largely dependent on agriculture for survival.

One of the reasons you made the trip to this summit is to make sure that the rest of the world is aware of the food security issues faced by your people as a result of climate change. Right now, the rich nations of the world are debating the international climate change agreement to be negotiated this December in Copenhagen, but they seem to focus mostly on how to regulate the carbon emissions of people in rich countries. That's important. It is long overdue for Americans and Europeans to start limiting their carbon emissions. But you want to be sure that December's climate talks also consider how to help people like the Bambara continue to feed themselves. Cutting emissions is important for the long run, but your people need assistance right now.

Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon

YOUR PEOPLE LIVE IN RAINFORESTS in the Amazon basin. The Amazon region is the largest rainforest in the world and consumes about one-fifth of the carbon dioxide produced from burning fossil fuels. The Amazon's role as a "carbon sink" that sucks global-warming carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere may be hurt. During a major drought in 2005, the fires that broke out in the western Amazon region put more carbon into the atmosphere than it soaked up. This may occur again as savannas (grasslands) replace rainforest, which will have a huge effect on your livelihood and the other 60 million Indigenous People in the region.

Climate scientists predict that higher worldwide temperatures caused by increased greenhouse gases in the atmosphere will reduce rainfall in the Amazon region, which will cause widespread local drought. With less water and tree growth, "homegrown" rainfall produced by the forest itself will decrease as well, as this depends on water passed into the atmosphere above the forests by the trees. The cycle continues, with even less rain causing more drought, and so on. This cycle puts the whole Amazon region at risk, which puts the whole world at risk.

Tropical rainforests have long been home to Indigenous Peoples who have shaped civilizations and cultures based on the environment in which they live. Living from nature, Native

Peoples have learned to watch their surroundings and understand the intricacies of the rainforest. Over generations your people have learned the importance of living within your environment and have come to rely on the countless renewable benefits that forests can provide. You believe "The earth is our historian, our educator, the provider of food, medicine, clothing, and protection. She is the mother of our races." This is something Indigenous Peoples have to teach the entire world.

When most people think about greenhouse gas pollution and climate change, they think about burning fossil fuels like coal, oil, and natural gas. But every year, cutting down forests is responsible for 20 to 25 percent of worldwide greenhouse gas emissions. You know the unique role the Amazon Basin plays in regulating global climate. You also know how loggers, miners, oil companies, pipeline builders, and ranchers continue to steal your land and kill your people. If the so-called developed world really wants to stop climate change, then they have to take serious action to protect the rainforests where you live. The survival of Indigenous Peoples in the Amazon will contribute to the survival of everyone on earth.

Moving out of your forest homes is not an option. Your people have lived in and with the forests for millennia. You're not going anywhere.

Dine (Navajo) People of the American Southwest

YOU COME FROM THE “PAINTED” red-rock deserts of the American Southwest, homeland of the Dine People (known as Navajo in English). The Dine/Navajo Nation is home to the largest Native American population in the United States, more than 180,000 people. In some ways, your hometown of Shiprock looks like any other small town in America—gas stations, motels, a few restaurants and grocery stores—but it’s very different in other ways. More than half the Navajo population lives below the U.S. poverty line.

Many people on the reservation still speak the traditional Dine language (in addition to English), and across the desert farmers still practice traditional “dryland” methods of agriculture. But the entire American Southwest is 10 years into a deep drought that shows no sign of letting up, and even the traditional methods that Dine have used to grow food in the desert for the last thousand years are starting to fail. As the rate of global climate change increases, farming will likely get even harder for your people. One Dine farmer, Charles Chi, describes it this way: “People are messing with Mother Nature. And just like my forefathers, my grandpa used to say one of these days, there’s only going to be two weathers—fall or summer. Today, I think that he was telling the truth.”

Farming is not the only way that the Dine are connected to climate change. As energy companies look for ways to make electricity that release lower greenhouse gas emissions, some people are talking about nuclear power as a solution to our climate problems. They say that nuclear power can produce all the electricity we need, and not release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

But where is the uranium mined that fuels the nuclear plants? From your land. While Dine people

are some of the poorest in the United States, the Dine land is rich with uranium resources. You grew up hearing stories of the Dine men who worked in the yellowcake uranium mines, from the 1940s to the 1980s. You want others to hear these stories about family and friends who came home each day with clothes covered in yellow uranium dust. The companies that ran the mines told workers not to worry about the dust—that it was safe—but people now know that the mines exposed workers and their families to high levels of radiation.

The contaminated dust made its way into people’s lives in other ways too—hundreds of abandoned uranium pit mines filled with water and then became watering holes for Dine sheep herds. When families like yours butchered their sheep, they ate the uranium-infected meat. Today, the Dine suffer from high cancer rates and respiratory problems. One study found that cancer rates among Dine teenagers living near mine tailings are *17 times* the national average.

In 2005, the Navajo Nation banned uranium mining on its territory. But Hydro Resources Inc. (HRI) has been working with the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission to try to get approval for mining near Navajo communities in New Mexico. The company estimates that nearly 100 million pounds of uranium exists on those sites, worth millions of dollars. The group Eastern Navajo Dine Against Uranium Mining has fought HRI for more than a decade.

So Indigenous Peoples need to speak with one voice and say that not only do we have to support real solutions to climate change, we have to oppose *false* solutions—like nuclear power, that just leads to more poisoning of Indigenous People.

Pre-Conference Meetings

Group Names	What the world needs to know	What the world needs to do—Action Items