

Stockholm Convention COP 5, Geneva, Switzerland April 25-30, 2011
Indigenous Caucus Collective Statement for the Opening Session
Presented by Vi Waghiyi, Native Village of Savoonga, St. Lawrence Island, Alaska in the Arctic and
Alaska Community Action on Toxics
April 25, 2011

[Speaker opened with a short introduction in her Indigenous language of St. Lawrence Island Yupik]

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Delegates,

I am making this statement on behalf of the Global Indigenous Peoples Caucus for the Stockholm Convention COP 5 Opening Session. Our caucus represents Indigenous organizations, nations and peoples from the Arctic, Africa, the Caribbean, North, Central and South America, and the Pacific regions.

Indigenous Peoples continue to bear a disproportionate burden of the continued manufacturing, release and use of the POPS chemicals. As Indigenous Peoples, we emphasize that the total elimination of endosulfan and all other POPs will have a direct positive impact on safeguarding our health, the health of women, our way of life and future generations. This must remain the central goal of this COP 5 session and we seek the cooperation and commitment of countries in all regions to reach this goal to help impoverished indigenous populations defend themselves against the impacts of POPs.

Arctic Indigenous Peoples suffer levels of POPs contamination in blood and breast milk that are among the highest of any population on earth, even though these chemicals have never been produced in the Arctic. This recognition inspired the negotiation of the Stockholm Convention, as noted in Preambular Paragraph 3:

Acknowledging that the Arctic ecosystems and indigenous communities are particularly at risk because of the biomagnification of persistent organic pollutants and that contamination of their traditional foods is a public health issue

This must now motivate the Convention's strong implementation. Endosulfan contaminates the traditional foods of Indigenous Peoples and we ask that you take strong action to include this harmful chemical in Annex A of the Convention with no exemptions.

We respectfully ask that the Delegates keep in mind that they are discussing issues that have severe impacts on Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Long range transport is not an abstract scientific idea for us. Short term economic gains and interests need to be recognized as such and not permitted to take priority over our lives and health.

We affirm that the formal participation and unique contributions of Indigenous Peoples is vital to maintaining the original spirit and intent of the Stockholm Convention and ensuring the success of its effectiveness evaluation process currently under development.

We call for greater formal inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the work of the Convention. We are specifically proposing that COP 5 take action to create an Indigenous Peoples Working Group on Effective Implementation, consisting of Indigenous Peoples from all regions. We offer our good will and expertise to the Parties and to the Secretariat for the Stockholm Convention, and we affirm that Indigenous Peoples can be part of the solution to the POPs crisis.

Thank you.