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Open letter to the Foreign Ministers of Canada, Norway, Denmark, Russia and the United States present at the Arctic Summit (Chelsea, Quebec March 29, 2010)

The Indigenous Environmental Network, the Council of Canadians and the REDOIL Network urge you to work with the Arctic Council and other organizations not represented at the Arctic Summit to pursue a moratorium on all new exploration for fossil fuel resources in the Arctic region.

It is abundantly clear that we collectively face a climate crisis that requires profound changes to our economies and societies. Leading climate scientists are reporting that the highest safe level of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere is 350 parts per million (PPM). The concentration of CO₂ is now at 389ppm and we are already witnessing serious consequences. Melting glaciers, sea ice and permafrost in the Arctic region is sending a clear warning signal that greenhouse gas emissions caused by dependence on fossil fuels have reached dangerous levels.

It is imperative that steps are taken to transition away from fossil-fuel based economies. This includes significant investments and planning to reduce fossil fuel reliance that helps meet important needs, such as increased conservation, energy efficiency, renewable energy expansion, public transit and sustainable agriculture. Agreeing to a moratorium on all new exploration for fossil fuel resources is a logical first step in the transition off of fossil fuel reliance with a just transition to sustainable jobs, energy and environment.

With the discovery of 90 billion barrels of oil and 1,670 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, the Arctic is increasingly being framed as a final frontier for fossil fuel development.

Such development, possible in large part due to the impacts of climate change on a fragile Arctic ecosystem, will contribute to the already serious climate crisis, and is at odds with the needed transition away from fossil-fuel based economies. Instead of discussing the appropriate

exploitation of these reserves, your priority should be pursuing a moratorium on all new exploration of fossil fuel resources in the Arctic region.

We are also highly concerned about the potential impacts of further Arctic oil and gas developments (and other developments associated with an ice free north passage) on the fragile ice edge ecosystem of which circumpolar indigenous peoples rely upon for food security and cultural needs.

The IEN's work in the circumpolar region of Alaska, where thirty years of Arctic development has led to serious consequences, is illustrative of the risks in pursuing further oil and gas development in the Arctic region.

The climate crisis is visible in the region. So far, Arctic ice in the summer has decreased by 40 percent, sea level has risen by .2 meters overall, snow cover has decreased by 10 percent, 4.2 million acres of the forest in Alaska is dying because the spruce beetles now can reproduce twice as fast, with a longer season, (and devastate the forest), vector borne diseases (West Nile fever for example) are on the increase, and each year the record number of disasters attributed to climate change has increased dramatically.

Meanwhile, millions of acres of Alaska's Outer Continental Shelf (OCF) have been offered for leases in the federal government OCS five year plan, Indigenous communities in Alaska continue to maintain a subsistence way of life that is interdependent on the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas, Bristol Bay, and Cook Inlet. Offshore oil development within these areas is a threat to the subsistence livelihood of coastal communities.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is consistently at threat, the National Petroleum Reserve of Alaska is being further developed and the expansion is closer to communities, and now the Yukon Flats Wildlife Refuge is also being explored for possible oil and gas development. All of these areas are important for the subsistence use of Alaska's Indigenous peoples.

The health of Arctic Indigenous Peoples like Alaska Natives has steadily declined since oil and gas development first began over thirty years ago. Alaska Natives trying to maintain their fishing and land-based cultures, have been losing an uphill battle against a 'soup mixture' of invisible toxic intruders entering their bodies through their food source, air, land and water. What we do know is that communities living along side oil production and refining sites suffer irreversible health impacts from long term exposure to spent chemicals (such as nitrous oxides, benzene, sulfuric acid, and ammonia).

Additional findings of the IEN's work in the circumpolar region of Alaska include:

- Oil and Gas Development: Requires use of noisy seismic surveys to search for oil. Spills and other toxic releases are likely.
- Impact on Wildlife Habitat: Toxics accumulate in animal tissues and whales shift migration patterns.
- Impact on Subsistence: Confusing and contradictory fish consumption warnings. Hunters forced to search further from home. Reduced catches and increasingly dangerous. There are shifts in eating patterns impacts nutrition and health (rise in diabetes, obesity, etc).

- Impact on Subsistence: The cumulative impacts of climate change on Arctic Indigenous Peoples health cannot be quantified. Environmental racism and eco-apartheid continues to impact their lives and culture, all for the benefit of American and Canadian energy consumption.

We are deeply alarmed by the accelerating climate devastation brought about by unsustainable development. Indigenous Peoples living in Arctic areas are experiencing disproportionate adverse impacts on cultures, human and environmental health, human rights, well-being, traditional livelihoods, food systems and food sovereignty.

Pursuing a moratorium on all new exploration for fossil fuel resources in the Arctic region is not only logical in the face of a climate crisis, further development of Arctic oil and gas stands to have devastating impacts on local Indigenous peoples.

Sincerely,



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Faith Gemmill, Executive Director
Resisting Environmental Destruction on Indigenous Lands

The Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN) is a North American based network of Indigenous Peoples empowering Indigenous Nations and communities towards sustainable livelihoods, demanding environmental justice and maintaining the Sacred Fire of our traditions. Our Native Energy and Climate Campaign strengthens and builds the capacity and political power of Indigenous Peoples to address the impacts of fossil fuel energy development in Indigenous communities and motivate the creation of sustainable and clean energy and climate policies at all levels of governance.

The Council of Canadians is one of Canada's largest public advocacy organizations, with members and chapters across the country. We work to promote progressive policies, and build grassroots movements supporting fair trade, clean water, energy security and sustainability and public health care. Our climate justice campaign rejects Canada's commitment to being an

export-oriented “energy Super power,” affirms unsustainable production, consumption and trade as root causes of the climate crisis and works for solutions based on principles of democratic accountability, ecological sustainability and social justice.

REDOIL is an Alaska Native Network of the Inupiat, Yupik, Aleut, Tlingit, Eyak, Gwich’in and Denaiana Athabascan Tribes. REDOIL is a movement of Alaska Natives who are challenging the fossil fuel and mining industry and demanding our rights to a safe and healthy environment conducive to subsistence. We aim to address the human and ecological health impacts brought on by unsustainable development practices of the fossil fuel and mining industry, and the ensuing effect of catastrophic climate change. We strongly support the self-determination right of Tribes in Alaska, as well as a just transition from fossil fuel and mining development to sustainable economies, and sustainable development.