



Media Briefing Paper

KAIROS Media Briefing Papers are written to help inform public discourse on key domestic and foreign issues.

Cheryl McNamara, Media and Advocacy Coordinator, KAIROS Canada • 416-875-0097 • cmcnamara@kairoscanada.org

Decolonization is at the heart of effective climate action

They are impacted the most by the climate crisis and generally excluded from climate negotiations, and yet Indigenous communities and people from the Global South, particularly women, hold the key to some of its crucial solutions.

If we want a shot at maintaining a relatively stable biosphere, these communities and peoples – who remain largely ignored - need to be full partners in developing and maintaining the actions required. It means having equitable seats at decision making tables and being fully consulted and well invested. It also means understanding and addressing how colonization is a root cause of the climate crisis.

Indeed, in its latest report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [states](#) with high confidence that “historical and ongoing patterns of inequity such as colonialism” help drive vulnerability in ecosystems and people.

The failure to alter the trajectory of a changing climate in the past three decades demonstrates that new, different and better directions are needed.

Impacts



Indigenous Peoples speaking at the Peoples Plenary at COP26. Photo: UNclimatechange.

Indigenous peoples are particularly vulnerable. They live in regions with rapidly changing climates: the Arctic, tropical rainforests, semi-arid lands, small islands, and high mountains. This is compounded by discriminatory laws that marginalize and impoverish them. Despite comprising five percent of the world’s population, Indigenous peoples constitute 15 percent of the world’s poor, [according to](#) the International Labour Office.

Women – whether Indigenous or from the Global South - are acutely impacted as well. Climate change's gendered impacts are well documented and can be summed up in one startling statistic. Of the millions of people displaced annually due to the climate crisis, 80 percent are women, according to a United Nations Development Program [policy brief](#).

“The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) has warned that, while women, and especially poor women, are more likely to suffer injury or death when a natural disaster occurs, they are often excluded from planning processes and discussions on climate change. Given that discriminatory practices lead to the segregation of certain groups into high-risk neighbourhoods, and that Indigenous peoples in particular are often excluded from decision-making, education, healthcare and information regarding assistance and relief programmes, the vulnerability of Indigenous women to the slightest of shocks is greatly magnified.” International Labour Office report, [Indigenous peoples and climate change: From victims to change agents through decent work](#).

Why are women and girls particularly impacted? For many reasons: Women are more vulnerable to the climate crisis because of their close contact with the water and the environment. When communities are displaced by climate change, women are more prone to violence. When women speak out to defend the environment and their communities, they face stigmatization and threats. Additionally, worldwide, women are disenfranchised due to patriarchy and cultural and/or religious norms that limit their access to education, resources and economic opportunities, as well as their involvement in decision making processes at the political and household levels.

[According to the World Bank](#), only between 10 and 20 percent of Global South women are landowners, even though they comprise more than 40 percent of the overall agricultural labour force.

KAIROS partners with women-led organizations in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Philippines, South Sudan and the West Bank in their work on women, peace and security initiatives. These organizations help women heal from conflict and become effective peacebuilders. For many years, they have identified the links between the climate crisis, conflict and gender in equities and violence.

For example, many KAIROS partners report on changing rain patterns that impact crops and impoverish communities. As a result, there is a rise in domestic violence and migration, making women even more vulnerable to abuse. Drought forces women further afield to find water - making them more prone to sexual violence.

Although the gap remains in research and policy related to the nexus of climate, conflict and gender, this nexus is beginning to be recognized. In August 2022, Canadian aid agencies warned of a [rise in early marriages](#) due to food shortages resulting from the war in Ukraine and climate change. This is a phenomenon already reported by KAIROS' partners.

Women and Indigenous communities are also [particularly impacted by resource extraction projects](#), whether for fossil fuels that are contributing to the climate crisis or critical minerals

meant to tackle it. These projects often lead to sexual and domestic violence, and damaged ecosystems that harm women and communities reliant on them for their well-being.



“Climate change has become a big issue as thousands of South Sudanese are affected by floods with no access to food and safe drinking water. This has been challenging as these areas are inaccessible and they lie within the scope of our work of conflict resolution... There is no sufficient early warning system and mobility has become a challenge.” - [Juan Racheal Michael Roberto](#), Advocacy Coordinator for South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC), a long-term ecumenical and KAIROS partner in South Sudan.

A seat at decision-making tables

In the middle of the last decade, the United Nations began to address this deficit in support for marginalized communities and demographics, particularly women.

The United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, released in 2015, includes gender equality ([SDG 5](#)). The Paris Agreement urges member states to adopt gender-responsive approaches. COP26 included a [Gender Day](#) where women leaders [flagged](#) the dearth in overseas development targeted at gender equity. COP27’s Gender Day is November 14.

While there had been [noted improvements](#) in gender integration in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) that countries submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change ([UNFCCC](#)) in the lead up to COP26, the same cannot be said about Indigenous peoples. The Rights and Resources Initiative [found that](#) for the most part NDCs ignored the role of Indigenous peoples in tackling the climate crisis.

[Canada’s NDC](#) promises “to position Indigenous climate leadership as a cornerstone of Canada’s Strengthened Climate Plan and ensure that federal initiatives support Indigenous Peoples’ climate priorities and ambitions.”

However, in view of the number of Indigenous-led legal challenges against the Canadian government regarding fossil fuel and mining projects, and the government’s frequent failure to observe free, prior and informed consent, meaningful fulfillment of this promise remains to be seen.

As well, despite the lip service, when it came to the negotiating table at COP26, Indigenous peoples and racialized women were notably absent. Outside the formal negotiations though, they were very much present. Their voices rang out in the streets in Glasgow.

Their presence was hard earned, given the financial challenges of being in Glasgow. For them, who interact with and use natural resources and ecosystems daily, the climate emergency is very real, requiring their voices at the table and immediate action. But, judging from COP26’s disappointing [outcomes](#), this sense of urgency was missing at the Global North and male-dominated inner sanctum.

Speaking from the Indigenous Peoples' Pavilion at COP26 in Glasgow, Eriel Tchekwie Deranger, a member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and Executive Director of Indigenous Climate Action, told Laura Lynch of CBC's 'What in the World':

“I think that there is an improvement in the visibility of Indigenous peoples, Indigenous voices and Indigenous issues but we're still not seeing substantive changes to the mechanisms within the UNFCCC processes. These systems are fundamentally created for colonial systems. They were not created for us or for us to succeed within them.”

Leïla Cantave, one of three interns of the [Black Environmental Initiative](#) who attended COP26 told Canada's National Observer: “We don't want to bring all the broken pieces in the system now into this new transition that everyone is excited about. I just refuse to believe that at some point, we're not going to be heard.”

And yet, a month before COP27, young African climate activists were [raising red flags](#) about their struggle to secure accreditation and funds to participate at the “African COP.”

Indigenous peoples and Global South communities must have an integral role at COP 27.

“I have a voice. I want the privilege to speak. Despite Egypt being called an African COP, we're having a very serious challenge and many countries most affected by the climate crisis won't be represented.” [Goodness Dickson](#), 29, from Abuja, Nigeria.

Colonial climate action

Currently, high emitting countries are driving climate research and solutions. Their high-level involvement is expected and required. Ignored, however, are Indigenous and Global South communities who are impacted the most by the climate crisis and offer compelling solutions.

Often, Indigenous peoples find themselves battling a narrative, rooted in white supremacy and white saviourism, that claims that they cannot be trusted to look after their own land, and that white conservationists know best – a narrative that has some roots in 19th century [America](#) and continues to influence global conservation efforts.

Protected areas now make up more than [twice the size of Canada, or 15 percent of the planet's land surface](#), and have been drawn with the understanding that nature must be separate from human activity that impacts it.

For decades, international NGOs such as [Survival](#) and [Forest Peoples Programme](#) have [decried](#) conservation efforts, such as protected areas or national parks, that forcefully and often violently remove Indigenous peoples from their lands.

These actions violate the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including Free, Prior, and Informed Consent. According to Survival, governments and conservationist fail to consult Indigenous peoples before evicting them.

“Colonial conservation, also known as Fortress Conservation, rests on the racist misconception that Indigenous people cannot be trusted to look after their own land and the animals that live there,” [writes Survival](#). “Its proponents view the original custodians of the land as a ‘nuisance’ to be ‘dealt with’, instead of as experts in local biodiversity and key partners in conservation.”

Indigenous communities rely on the land for their livelihoods and cultural practices. Sustainable practices developed [for at least 12,000 years](#) make Indigenous peoples key players in decarbonization and adaptation measures.

“The government looks favorably on ‘productive’ activities like mining but not on our traditional cultural practices, which they don’t understand. If the government cared about protecting the land, it would be the other way around, and we would be in charge of conservation,” says Alex Lucitante, a Cofán Indigenous guard in Ecuador. From [Foreign Policy: How conservation became colonialism](#).

Defending Indigenous and local stewardship

Colonialism marked Indigenous peoples for elimination and genocide. And yet Indigenous communities persist in the face of centuries of catastrophe and despite systemic exclusion. Non-Indigenous peoples can learn from them.

Indigenous peoples in Canada and globally urge us to change our approach to climate policy and our relationship with the environment. We need to decolonize our relationship with the Earth.



Tia Kennedy

“Indigenous peoples have the longest standing relationship with Mother Earth and the necessary values to affect meaningful and quick change,” says [Tia Kennedy](#), a KAIROS and For the Love of Creation Indigenous youth delegate to COP27. “We view the Earth as our mother, rather than a resource for monetary gain. Those are the people who should be leading this conversation, because the solutions have always been here.”

And yet when Indigenous leaders and environmental activists speak out to protect the environment and their communities, they are targeted, threatened and/or killed.

In the 2022 report, [A Decade of Defiance: Ten years of reporting land and environmental activism worldwide](#), Global Witness highlights the increasing urgency to protect land and environmental defenders as climate and biodiversity crisis worsens. Research shows that in the past decade, more than 1,700 land and environmental defenders were killed (a murder every two days). The research has also highlighted that Indigenous communities face a disproportionate level of these attacks – nearly 40 percent - even though they make up only five percent of the world’s population.

Defending the rights and the lives of Indigenous and land defenders is part of our role in combatting the climate crisis. Canada has guidelines, [Voices at Risk](#), to support and protect human rights defenders worldwide. These must be implemented.



“By recognizing Indigenous peoples’ rights, by recognizing their ancestral lands, we are making our move to protect the environment, and to stop climate change.”
- [Paul Belisario](#), International Peoples Movement of Self Determination and Liberation.

Gender equity is foundational for healthy communities, democracies and ecosystems

The rise in authoritarianism worldwide impacts how the climate crisis is addressed both directly and indirectly. Authoritarian leaders such as Brazil’s Bolsonaro, Hungary’s Orban and the U.S.’s Trump have dismissed the urgency of the crisis and dismantled efforts to tackle it. These regimes were also quick to claw back women’s rights. At the same time, there is increasing evidence that women are a potent force against authoritarianism and the climate crisis.

“Aspiring autocrats and patriarchal authoritarians have good reason to fear women’s political participation: when women participate in mass movements, those movements are both more likely to succeed and more likely to lead to more egalitarian democracy,” write Harvard scholars, Erica Chenoweth and Zoe Marks, in their article [Revenge of the Patriarchs](#) in Foreign Affairs Magazine.

Women, particularly those who are Indigenous, have served as key leaders in grassroots land and water defence, and peace development processes. When women participate at national and international negotiating tables, there is a noted improvement in environmental protection.

“Women’s participation in decision making at higher levels has specifically benefitted environmental policy, such that countries with more women in their parliaments are more likely to set aside protected land areas and ratify international environmental treaties,” [according to](#) the International Union for Conservation of Nature. “In fact, new data reveals that there is a causal relationship between environment and gender; when gender inequality is high, forest depletion, air pollution and other measures of environmental degradation are also high.”



Sweet potato crop harvest in the DRC by SALVIS Nyatende members January 2021. KAIROS’ partner Héritiers de la Justice assists this project. Photo: Héritiers de la Justice.

Women in Canada and the Global South who work the land have also demonstrated deep knowledge in regenerative farming and forestry.

[According to Trina Moyles](#), author of *Women Who Dig*, women-led farmer operations in the Global South and North America/Turtle Island “tend to be small-scale, biodiverse, mixed systems, often relying on natural, organic or regenerative methods.... Every woman I interviewed for my book expressed her concern for land and environment and the importance of stewarding healthy soil, water, and natural ecosystems. I think women recognize the relationships

between healthy food, community, and land — you can't really have one without the other.”

Canadian words need action

The Canadian government has acknowledged the important role of women and Indigenous-led climate action in its [2021 Nationally Determined Contributions](#). It supports the [UNFCCC Gender Action Plan](#) to further advance women-led and gender responsive climate action at national and multilateral levels, and Indigenous Peoples' climate priorities and ambitions.

These good words need to be translated into meaningful action.

[The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#) came into force on June 21, 2021. An action plan to achieve the Declaration's objectives is expected by June 2023, based on consultation with Indigenous peoples in Canada. According to the law, progress on the plan will be submitted to Parliament annually. As Free, Prior and Informed Consent is a key part of the Declaration, Indigenous communities will need to be brought fully to the table of all projects that impact them. Will Indigenous women be part of that process? Up to now, they have been largely excluded.

On the global front, Canada has a world-class [Feminist International Assistance Policy](#), but this policy needs a guiding document and is chronically underfunded.

In the 2021 Throne Speech, the government promised to increase Canada's foreign assistance budget each year, and invest in sustainable, equitable, and feminist development that benefits the world's most vulnerable and promotes gender equality.

For years KAIROS has joined hundreds of civil society organizations and countless Canadians in urging the government to increase its overseas development assistance to match the international standard of 0.7 percent of national wealth by 2030. That is less than one penny for every dollar. The government increased international assistance funding in its [2022/2023 budget](#) from \$7.6 billion in 2021/2022 to \$8.2 billion with a focus on global COVID-19 efforts and strengthening global health security.

However, funding also needs to reach grassroots women's rights and peacebuilding organizations. As we have seen, women are often the ones leading the charge on community-based regenerative farming and tree planting, critical in sequestering carbon and restoring resilient local ecologies. They are also the glue that binds families and communities, and the ones who creatively resist authoritarian regimes. They are at the heart of building back better.

In addition to being compromised by limited funding, Canada's feminist foreign policy is further undermined by Canada's diplomatic and financial support for the profit-driven extractive economy which, in the absence of corporate accountability legislation, has a track record of violating ecosystems and women.

To be truly feminist, Canada must fully consult women — particularly land and water defenders — to lay the groundwork for community-driven and inclusive clean energy economies, and must fully invest in these efforts. Extractive companies — two thirds of which are headquartered in Canada — must be made fully accountable for their actions.

“Advocates are quick to point out that a feminist policy encompasses more than armed conflict. It is about exploring ‘what makes us safe’ in an increasingly fragile and interconnected world. It is about understanding the threats of climate change, pandemics, and global inequality—and the many ways these threats [intersect](#). It is about asking what values we stand for as Canadians. It is about re-examining power and structures in the global system.” - Beth Woroniuk, Policy Lead at the Equality Fund in an op-ed for iPolitics entitled: [Now is the time for Canada’s Feminist Foreign Policy](#).

KAIROS Canada Recommendations

That the Canadian government:

- Strengthens its feminist foreign policy and understanding of security by allocating resources to the nexus between the Women, Peace and Security agenda and environmental justice.
- Commits to grants-based climate funding that builds capacity and expands the influence of Global South grassroots women’s organizations and movements in an integrated, feminist global approach to the climate crisis, peace and security.
- Develops with the full and meaningful representation of Black, Indigenous, and racialized people, particularly women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, a Feminist Foreign Policy that is grounded in Indigenous and racial justice, is human rights-based and intersectional, and does not allow economic and corporate interests to obstruct these principles.
- Upholds the rights, knowledge, and sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples in all climate- and water-related policy decision-making. Develops environmental policies rooted in Indigenous self-determination and consistent with UNDRIP.
- Shifts the focus of climate financing from a predominantly technical approach to one that addresses and funds both mitigation and adaptation equally and supports countries and communities that are most impacted by climate change, including support for loss and damages.
- Fully funds and implements the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), increases official development assistance to the international standard of 0.7 percent by 2030, and ensures this funding reaches grassroots women’s rights and peacebuilding organizations, including to support their recovery and transformation efforts in response to the pandemic. This funding must be flexible, predictable, and long-term.
- Tackles environmental racism in Canada and abroad by passing [Bill C-226](#), the environmental racism law, and two corporate accountability bills: [Bill C-262](#), to adopt [mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence legislation](#), and [Bill C-263](#) to empower the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise.
- Supports the adoption of a loss and damages response fund.
- Fulfills the Equality Fund [recommendations](#).
- Fulfills the African Feminist Taskforce and Women & Gender Constituency [Demands for COP27](#).
- Fulfills the [recommendations of Climate Action Network Canada](#), calling for strengthening climate and nature multilateralism centered around peace, democracy, and dialogue.

KAIROS/For the Love of Creation Delegation to COP27

KAIROS and For the Love of Creation are sending 10 delegates to the United Nations Conference on Climate Change COP27 in Sharm al-Sheikh, Egypt, November 8-18 to advocate for a seat at decision-making tables to tackle the climate crisis. Delegates include Indigenous partners and youth from Turtle Island, and KAIROS Women, Peace and Security and global solidarity partners. The delegation is using the United Church of Canada's accreditation to COP27. [Learn more.](#)

Delegates from Canada are:

[Clifford Mushquah](#), Anishinaabe from Pawgwasheeng (Pays Plat First Nation) on the northshore of GichiGami (Lake Superior). KAIROS Blanket Exercise Facilitator

[Tia Kennedy](#), Oneida Nation of The Thames and Walpole Island First Nation. Youth Delegate

[Yusra Shafi](#), International student from Kuwait at University of Toronto in Psychology and Environmental Behaviour, intern at Development and Peace. Youth Delegate

Global delegates are:

[Kelly Campo](#) (Organización Femenina Popular (OFP) – Colombia

[Ivonne Yanez](#) (Acción Ecológica) – Ecuador

[Noble Wadzah](#) (Oil Watch Africa) – Ghana

[Chantal Bilulu](#) (Héritiers de la Justice) – Democratic Republic of Congo

[Juan Rachael Michael Roberto](#) (South Sudan Council of Churches) – South Sudan

[Hana Kare](#) (Wiam: Palestine Conflict Transformation Centre) – West Bank, Palestine

[Paul Belisario](#) (International Indigenous Peoples Movement for Self Determination and Liberation) – Philippines

KAIROS COP27 Delegation Vision

We are committed to climate and ecological justice that is led by people and communities that are most affected by the climate crisis, including Indigenous peoples and women. With partners we seek to understand and address the intersection of climate change, conflict and gender inequity as well as the centrality of Indigenous history and leadership in climate action. Framed around the theme “Decolonizing Climate Change” we are supporting a delegation of women peacebuilders, land defenders, and Indigenous peoples to COP27 to raise awareness of their critical and urgent role in addressing climate change – in changing the direction.



TORONTO OFFICE

80 Hayden Street, Suite 400
Toronto, ON M4Y 3G2
Tel: 416-463-5312
Toll Free: 1-877-403-8933
info@kairoscanada.org

OTTAWA OFFICE

211 Bronson Ave, Suite 306
Ottawa, ON K1R 6H5
Tel: 613-235-9956

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