



TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE FORUM REPORT

APRIL 2025

Traditional Ecological Knowledge Forum

Report

Congress of Nations and States (CNS)

April 2025 Report

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Speakers



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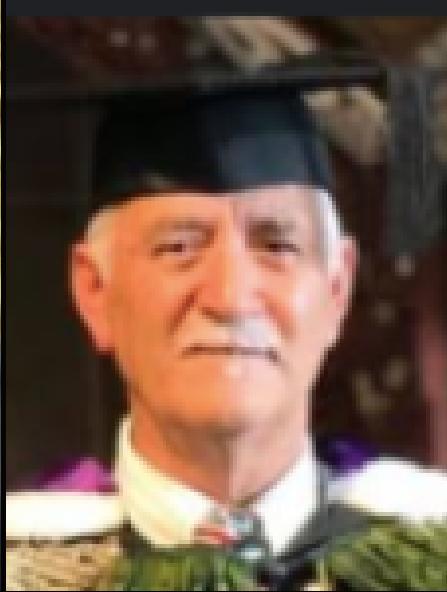
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Tsering Passang
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Owen Lloyd
(Hapu Tribe)

Director and Moderators



Sarah Ferriere
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Crystal Mandica,
(Amphibian Foundation-
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Sidhivi Sharma
(CNS Moderator)



Tim Franklin
(CNS Moderator)

TEKF DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Sarah Ferriere

“When the blood in your veins returns to the sea, and the earth in your bones returns to the ground, perhaps then you will remember that this land does not belong to you, it is you who belong to this land.”¹

Native American people are deeply connected with nature and see themselves inseparable from it. Nature is intrinsically linked to their core identity and it is this way for many Peoples around the globe. “When nature’s balance is restored, ecosystems heal themselves,”² a key lesson on nature and a lesson well understood by Peoples. Nature has this incredible power to soothe itself when given the chance.

The scientific and indigenous communities know how well biodiversity forms to give us ecosystem services, a term used to ascertain the value of nature in human perspective. From water purification to pollination, to absorbing carbon emissions, nature has given us a wide range of resources and value such as food, water and oil besides genetics, medicines and cultural services.³ It is well documented through the international community and there is a consensus to say that indigenous people have undeniable knowledge and are active actors of local sustainable practices with their deep-root connection, along with their practical and spiritual approaches to their environment. Peoples are calling for the protection of their lands and recognition of their rights.

Damaged ecosystems exacerbate the climate crisis undermining nature’s ability to regenerate herself. The inter-connectivity between resources scarcity, biodiversity losses, climate change and people’s well-being exist and leaving nature imbalance poses a threat to humankind survival. The pressure human beings are making to our blue planet is a global threat for communities around the world, disrupting our societal well-being and our future as sustainable.

Functioning healthy ecosystems, as a provisioning service, is an essential link to our food systems and our livelihoods as a whole. Food security is then an important preoccupation to communities due to the constant pressure upon our biosphere by human activities. It is also the case for water as many water-related risks including but not limited to a lack of access to clean drinking water and sanitation, are falling upon communities. Furthermore, land’s fragmentation, artificial boundaries set up by colonialism throughout history, deforestation and resource extraction have

¹ This quote from a proverb has been attributed to the Chief of the Duwamish Tribe (Seattle, Washington).

² Rewilding Academy, “How wolves change rivers”, accessed May 5, 2025, <https://rewilding.academy/how-wolves-change-rivers/>.

³ Pearce, Reagan, “What are ecosystem services”, *Earth.org*, January 3, 2023, accessed May 7, 2025, <https://earth.org/what-are-ecosystem-services/>.

made traditional territories faced serious threats by the world's demographic pressure.⁴ A lack of respect for peoples and community's rights has resulted in the depletion of their cultural identity, livelihoods and exacerbated the climate crisis. Protecting the land and all its bio-components is essential for our own survival, especially in this world where the extractive industries' appetite for resources is incommensurable. Safeguarding our planet's resources and its ecological integrity is a shared challenge and we need more than ever effective solutions.

Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) may be one of the solutions. These ancestral systems for indigenous people have been a sustainable way of life. Even with the global climate crisis, indigenous people still rely on these solutions to adapt to their environment, living with nature itself, taking resources not with a western point of view but as their own meaning of "resources" as their traditional systems are nature-based and rely on sustainable management. They have cultivated these ecological systems that are in symbiosis with nature. In fact, nature has always been in the heart of their communities. It is well known to the world that Peoples are often viewed as stewards of natural resources and the guardian of biodiversity demonstrated over centuries their capacity to protect, restore and manage ecosystems. They are the people that have seen the changes of the climate overtime, but still adapted their practices through their ecological knowledge and developing effective solutions with it.⁵ In this context, discussing land rights, water rights and protection as well as climate change through the lens of traditional ecological knowledge is not an aberration and can be helpful in finding our ways to adapt in this changing world.

The Traditional Ecological Knowledge Forum (TEKF) presented by the Congress of Nations and States (CNS), attempts to give new insights on these subjects from this perspective and needs to be seen as an open discussion. This roundtable exchange is a way to listen to the voices of diverse groups and their concern on the themes captured. It intends to help raise awareness on the importance of preserving and promoting various forms of traditional ecological knowledge and to increase conversations around topics which are led by members from a diverse range of communities.⁶

Our planet offers challenges, we as human beings often don't recognize another as equal, nevertheless differences make diversity and diversity is a motor of life itself. Our environment is a part of us but for some individuals it takes more than just a part and is intrinsically linked to the identity. Loss, suffering, mass graving, and atrocities are words that are now considered *common language* when we talk about the lives of Peoples. Deforestation, pollution, resource extraction, fragmentation, biodiversity loss, are words that are also commonly associated with nature in our modern world. There is some sort of normalization with these words because we hear them in a perpetual cycle. As much as we are now living under threat of the effects of climate change, these

⁴ Congress of Nations and States (CNS), 2025. Traditional Ecological Knowledge Forum (TEKF). Congress of Nations and States (CNS), accessed May 9, 2025, <https://cnsintl.net/tekf/>.

⁵ IWGIA, "The Indigenous World 2020" (World: Dwayne Marno,2020), pp. 1-784., p.9.

⁶ Congress of Nations and States (CNS), *supra* note 4.

People are among the first to face those changes that were made to their surroundings due to anthropocentric hands, despite having the least contribution to it.⁷ Themes like the ones presented in this forum such as land rights and food security, water rights and protection or even climate change, are important issues that need to be spoken/addressed. These issues touch all communities around the world.

Resilience, fights and exchange, stand up, advocacy are now becoming marker words in the international community and it is making its way up to grasp the issues that are today discussed and debated in our TEKF. It also demonstrates how important it is to create a platform like this one for opportunity, expression, discussion, and why not solutions. TEK is a precious tool that has been passed on through generations of Peoples and that has been working to assist humans with resilience and adaptation to the constantly changing environment. It is therefore an important resource to protect and voice to be heard.

Given the success of the first round of TEKF in 2025, we are excited to continue discussions in the future.

Hope is a sweet whisper to the ear so let's make it a little spicy for the future!

⁷ IWGIA, *supra* note 5, p.9.

Session 1:

LAND RIGHTS AND FOOD SECURITY

April 4, 2025 12 PM ET



Owen Lloyd
(Hapu Tribe)



Tsering Passang
(Tibet)



Ahmed Youssouf
Mohamed
(Afar Nation)



Sidhivi Sharma
(CNS Moderator)

The protection of land rights and the protection of land is a fundamental concern among many Peoples and their communities. In tandem with land rights are the concerns raised about food security. This webinar will explore this topic through the lens of traditional ecological knowledge and how communities in practice are protecting their land rights and increasing food security despite the challenges that climate change may pose. Following the speaker interventions there will be open discussion on the topic, please come ready to share.

Session 1: Land rights and food security

Session Highlights

Ahmed Youssouf, Afar Nation

Knowledge holder raised:

- The background of the Afar people, which inhabit an area known as the "Afar Triangle," which encompasses the modern sovereign states of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti. As long established and resilient communities, the Afar population, numbering between 3 to 4 million people across these three countries, share a distinct language, customs, and traditions
- The Afar people predominantly rely on traditional pastoralism, fishing, and salt extraction as their primary sources of sustenance. Despite their rich cultural heritage and resource-abundant territories, they face a myriad of challenges, including political oppression, socioeconomic marginalization, displacement, and limited access to education and healthcare.
- Prior to European colonization, the Afar nation was governed by its traditional sultanates, which autonomously governed Afar societies through Indigenous customary laws and legal systems. Dankalia was a former Italian colony and now is located in northeastern part of the state of Eritrea.
- The Government of Eritrea is an authoritarian regime under the firm control of President Isaias Afwerki. The only and governing party, The People's Front for Democracy and Justice, held a founding congress where it introduced policies aimed at eradicating Indigenous rule. These policies sought to destroy the existing customary law, land rights, and cultural identity of the Afar Indigenous nation. Additionally, the government of Eritrea enacted Land Proclamation No. 58/1994, which legalized the seizure of traditional and communal lands, as well as strategic resources, that were privately owned by nations such as the Afar.
- Knowledge holder described the terrible impact this land policies had on the Afar people. Which have included violent campaigns to displace the indigenous Afar population from their strategic resources and territories.
- Eritrean state refuses to compensate the Afar for land seizures or the use of extraction companies, nor does it acknowledge their rights to free, prior, and informed consent. Knowledge Holder described UN action on the violence, specifically the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea stating that crimes against humanity have been committed against the Eritrean Afar since 1991.
- Bodies such as the CNS and other advocacy groups need to continue their efforts in highlighting the plight of the indigenous communities. Collaborative efforts should focus on promoting Indigenous land rights, and their rights to self-determination, ensuring fair

compensation for expropriated lands, and fostering an environment where the cultural heritage and traditional livelihoods of nations such as the Afar are respected and preserved.

- The inclusion of the Afar voice in forums like the Traditional Ecological Knowledge Forum is a significant step towards recognizing and addressing their issues. It is through such platforms that Afar and other marginalized communities can share their stories, seek solidarity, and work towards a future where their rights are upheld and their contributions to society are valued.

Owen Lloyd from Hapū tribe, Māori

Knowledge Holder raised:

- Mr. Lloyd spoke in Māori to the group acknowledging ancestors and the loss of their land that holds a deep connection to their people due to their ancestral culture and spirituality that they have with their lands.
- Talked about their language being minimized by the colonial power in place and suffer great loss, they suffered from the loss of billions of acres of their lands, forced to eat new food instead of their traditional resources, they suffered from loss connection to their lands, the forest they have now is too young, they became exiled because they stood up to their colonizer, resulting in the confiscation of their lands by the colonial power with the new laws they create to legalized their actions. (Out of approximate 68 million acres they collectively own 1.5m acres most of it un accessible or non-productive or in the hands of 'loyalist'). They are forced to speak English, cannot go hunting or fishing, cannot make a living from their lands because they do not have any, he has lost his wife due to the after effect of colonized policies placed upon them by the government of New Zealand.
- There is one million Māori, far less than settler numbers so they don't have vote because they are a minority in New Zealand "so called democracy."

Tsering Passang, Tibet.

Knowledge Holder raised:

- Disposal of their land and destruction of their traditional ecological land by the Chinese government. Tibetan land is deeply intertwined with their spirituality, with their identity, it is not just a physical parameter, it is not just agricultural and pastoral activities.
- Due to PRC occupation of their lands: Tibetan have been displaced, suffered degradation of their grassland due to mismanage policies by PRC, it also has disrupted their ancestral practices closely link to their food security (because there is a balance with their pastoral and agricultural activity due to their nomadic tradition). The forced organization coerced by PRC is not sustainable, PRC strategy also results in luring young Tibetan to money to evict them from their traditional ecological knowledge and indigenous identity and in fine their community.

- PRC policies over Tibet land result also in water scarcity, intensive building: severe ecological imbalances then emerge, affecting Tibetan community. Climate change poses highly challenges to the local community, all the more that they are not part of the discussion on policies regarding this issue nor regarding their ancestral lands.
- Tibetan People are working toward reclaiming their traditional ecological knowledge, with projects and initiatives such as organic farms, or within cooperation among refugees.
- Environmental activists are threatened due to their advocacy, experienced retaliation and punishments by local governments.
- Emphasis on: worldwide similar indigenous communities are faced with these land rights issues; they need platform like this one to advocate for their rights and share their issues. Need to protect their traditional ecological knowledge and land rights which are intrinsically link to their identity and survival.

Session 2:

WATER RIGHTS AND PROTECTION

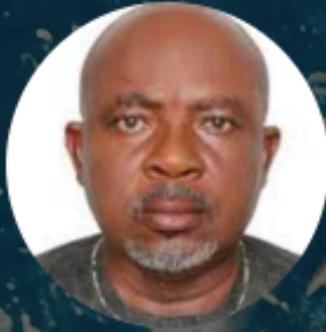
April 11, 2025 12 PM ET



Amy Wilson
(South Africa)



Alana Malinde
S.N. Lancaster
(Guyana/Barbad
os)



Irikefe V. Dafe
(Nigeria)



Crystal Mandica,
(Amphibian
Foundation-
Moderator)

Protecting water and its ecological integrity is a fundamental concern for many Peoples, as they continue to face many water-related risks and in many cases, Peoples lack access to clean drinking water. This webinar will explore this topic from a traditional ecological lens and blue justice lens and discuss ways in which Peoples around the world are securing water rights, increasing access to water, and adapting to the challenges climate change is posing to water resources. Following the speaker interventions there will be open discussion on the topic, please come ready to share.

Session 2: Water Rights and Water Protection

Session Highlights

Alana Malinde Lancaster (Guyana/Barbados)

Knowledge Holder raised:

- * Context of water rights and the protection of these rights, conceptualization of the earth as a watery place, with different types of water bodies.
- * Regional systems such those in Latin American & the Caribbean, Africa and the Middle East are way ahead of international bodies since they have incorporated the right to a healthy environment into their jurisprudence and into treaty laws. They are taking a human-right approach to water. In consequence, we should be addressing water related rights because those who rely on these resources for their daily needs, are often overlooked and face discrimination, suffering from marginalization.
- * Emergence of the concept of blue justice and its approach to the right of water to address the inequities in water rights. Blue justice as proposed by Isaacs (2018) focused on ensuring social and environmental fairness. It is a vocabulary in social justice and a term to advocate for the recognition of marginalized people's rights to water and equal participation access to the blue economy, and aims to promote sustainable ocean development.
- * The people which depend on water and its resources are often individuals from minority groups, women, children, Afro-descendant people, indigenous people and others from minority groups. These people are the ones suffering the most from coastal and marine harms and the ones excluded from marine decision-making, thus a need for a call for blue justice, and inclusive governance.
- * Some States have recognized the importance of water rights or given Nature rights such as the Mar Menor in Spain, the Rio Atrato in Columbia, the Whanganui River in New Zealand.
- * The coastal marine environment has *de facto* an impact on the blue economy in particular when we talk about fisheries.
- * Key message: when we talk about the right to water and the concept of blue justice, we need to see water not only as only one body but as the linkage between different types of aquatic bodies because on Earth there is not only the ocean, but there is also river, lakes, ponds, mangroves and so on. There is definitively a need to enhance participation from diverse groups and organizations and access to justice rights in water related spaces.

Irekefe V. Dafe (Nigeria)

Knowledge Holder raised:

- * "Water is not just a resource; it is a living entity, a sacred presence, and a bearer of life and identity for people and ecosystems."

* The traditional laws we have in every country have no consideration for nature. Human beings have rights, corporations have rights but what about forests, rivers, and other living bodies? They don't have rights as a person. There is a need to see Nature as a legal right. In Nigeria, it is almost done to give Nature a right with the river Ethiope with a movement to restore, protect and grant legal personhood to it.

* The river Ethiope is the longest natural inland water body in Nigeria that originates from Umuaja, Delta State. This river is considered a sacred spring, it runs through several communities including Abraka, Sapele, and others. It is a source of drinking water, use for agriculture, home for biodiversity and a spiritual identity for the community in Nigeria.

* Challenges faced by the Ethiope river due the ongoing pollution from domestic waste, deforestation, mono-culture and so on, triggered a movement in Nigeria, a collaboration with a lot of partners (grassroots movement, community-led movement, Earth law center USA) in the thrive to reconnect the river as an identity. We need to view Nature as a subject with rights nor as a property: respect for traditional knowledge is what water rights is all about.

* Application to protect river Ethiope with legal drafts and model declarations, recognition of a legal asset. In 2020, the stakeholder's declaration has been made: draft of a legal document that recognizes the river Ethiope as a legal person, draft of Rights of River Ethiope Bill to the National Assembly for consideration and passage into law. In 2023: draft ratified as a legal document with the adoption of Universal declaration of Rights of Rivers.

* Engagement from the Nigerian community to advocate to establish river Ethiope as a legal entity: with awareness campaigns, policy and academic engagements in Nigeria, to establish River Ethiope as a national freshwater park. These legal drafts and model declarations in Nigeria will be a template for others. But some challenges remain: lack of legal precedents, bureaucracy, delays, funding, communities skeptical. In 2030: hope to have full legal recognition of the water as a legal living entity.

Amy Wilson (South Africa)

Knowledge holder raised:

* Aquatic animals: no measurement of how many are killed each year by humans due to the constant increase in production, but to give you a number as an example there are around 76 trillion shrimps being killed each year.

* One of the problems is the misclassification we have as a person to regard an aquatic body as a thing and not as an identity in the law: it is a problematic view that can do so many damages to the environment by keeping up toward that way of thinking.

* We see aquatic animals as a solution to other animals (including us), we see them as limitless, as sustainable, they are not like us. This led human beings to mass killing animals, thus greatly affecting our blue planet.

* Number of threats are upon water bodies such as fishing. We not only kill tons of fishes in the ocean but also unintentionally bycatching a number of other species (which are hard to measure)

such as turtles, dolphins and so on, trapped in nets due to human activity on these marine ecosystems. Pollution is another threat. We definitely view some aquatic beings as harmful to us which poses a threat to them as a living entity.

* If you care about justice, you should start to care about aquatic living as an identity, like Polynesian indigenous groups have granted right to life to whales. Indigenous from New Zealand, Tahiti and Cook Islands signed a treaty that recognized them as legal persons.

* “We must work together where we can & build on these various intersections...to secure a better future for all.” Amy Wilson

Session 3:

CLIMATE CHANGE

April 25, 2025 at 12 pm ET



Jebra Muchahary
(Bodo Tribe)



Zoi Aliozi
(Greece)



Davie Donaldson
(Nawken)



Tim Franklin
(CNS Moderator)

Peoples around the world, in many cases, are being forced to adapt to human induced climate change quickly because many of the areas where they reside are considered ecologically sensitive and are often targeted for mining of mineral resources. This webinar will explore through the lens of traditional ecological knowledge the impact climate change is having on various communities around the world and how traditional ecological knowledge has been working to assist with resilience and adaptation to climate change. This webinar will also focus, as a conclusion to this series, the importance of the protection of traditional ecological knowledge, and what the international community can do to protect it. Following the speaker interventions there will be open discussion on the topic, please come ready to share.

Session 3: Climate Change, Adaption, and Resilience

Session Highlights

Jebra Muchahary, Bodo Tribe

Knowledge Holder shared:

* Jebra discussed his experiences of what spaces TEK has had in the climate change conference at an international level. Especially the experiences he got from his participation in three UN conferences on climate change.

* One conference happened in New Delhi, another one in Germany and the last one happened in the Netherlands. In all those three climate change conferences, he found a lack of political will to call and to go for concrete actions.

* In 2025, this year, the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) will have a meeting for the COP 30 in Brazil, but through his experiences he saw that indigenous people knowledge systems on climate change are not being given importance, indigenous and their knowledge are always on the sidelines, don't have a chance or given a view to share these traditional systems it in those conferences at an international level.

* Indigenous people's traditional knowledge systems is a system that has been going since immutable time, since the very beginning of human kind and has been a sustainable way of life for indigenous people since then, living their life within them. Even with global warming and climate shifting, they have been maintaining their ecosystems, their livelihood, their land use patterns, their food preparation and preservation, their weather prediction, the food security and human health, they are still able to maintain their life within their environmental conditions.

* Example: fish cannot survive without water, the same way indigenous people cannot survive without forests, with whom they have a symbiotic relationship. With the good surroundings especially the forest, they cannot separate themselves from their existing environment, they have a direct link interconnected with it.

* Bodo people: before constructing traditional houses with renewable materials that can last for two to three years, it is good practice for indigenous people because no greenhouse gases are emitted from this construction. They also plant banana trees around their houses because it maintains the water level of the soil around it, the same with Sal trees in India that can keep a cool environment around the houses.

* The traditional practice of Sal trees plantation is among the Adivasis of mainland India, especially in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh who worship them. Common practice of planting Banana, Bamboo and Areca Nut trees of the Boro Indigenous People surrounding their homes and villages help them maintaining their healthy green eco system and their good health.

* He wants to emphasize that the COP 30 looks forward as a target to reduce Greenhouse gases emissions to get under 1.5°C of global warming, but he fears that they will not be able to meet this target when he sees the things taking place with human activities around the world.

* He also wants to raise a point regarding the carbon trading ideas of European countries that dramatically helped to destroy the forests by tearing down the old living forests and renewing them by so called new trees in those deforested areas, leaving nature imbalance. It gave permission to the European countries industrial companies, a permit to permit more carbon emissions and pollute even more thus giving imbalance diversity.

* We need to change our way of thinking, giving effective participation to indigenous people and their best practices in the international community, otherwise climate change will remain and there will never be a practicable approach.

Dr Zoi Aliozi (Greece)

Knowledge Holder shared:

* Through the lens of climate justice: TEK is not only wisdom from the past but also solutions from the future, lots of utility and teaching in that. We can use it to promote climate change, to protect our planet. Not only practices for forest management but a whole way of seeing the world, it is knowledge that lives, that passes through the lands itself, through rituals, questioning our place in the cosmos, it is very important to promote and respect this traditional knowledge for future policies.

* TEK is powerful because it shows how to live with nature, not against it. Indigenous people can show us how to live in harmony to have the best sustainable way of living, in a sustainable way to survive and make sure you have food on table so to speak. But we live in the time where people lose their lands, their language. Climate justice makes indigenous people vulnerable. They are the least responsible of climate change but suffer the most from it.

* She emphasizes the 7th generation principles on taking decisions of TEK: indigenous people call the elders to solve it, but in order to find solutions, they ask themselves first how these solutions will affect the 7th generation. These are the good things to incorporate in future policies.

* We also need to see the legal systems: most laws in international systems are in anthropocentric views, always concentrated on humans. In her understanding: that's why we are in this climate crisis and it is horrible. This anthropocentric view sees Humans as separated from Nature, entitled to own everything, animals and plants as just resources rather than own beings.

* We need to stay optimistic because in some places around the world we are starting to see Nature as subject of rights, we see countries give rights to rivers and mountains in order to protect them from human exploitation.

* Last, she advocates climate justice in order to stop the exploitation of nature as a bank of resources. This is not right, this is taking us self-distraction. Climate justice needs to be respecting

indigenous governance, as well as protecting their TEK. It is a guide for the future, there is a lot to learn from TEK.

Davie Donaldson, Nawken

Knowledge Holder shared:

* Starting with a reflection from his community from the climate crisis and their impact in Scotland climate change as on them, he then talked about how the knowledge of its people the Nawken is always left out of the conversation of politics.

* The Nawken are deeply connected with their environment as they are nomadic people, they live through lands and seas. But he saw the shifting of the places he used to be nomadic with his people where they were stopping for centuries due to the effect of climate change from coastal erosion to flooding areas. Their traditional roots are being disrupted, as much as taking from them a piece of their culture.

* The sea is changing too, which has a major impact on Nawken People as they rely greatly on the shores and the marine systems for their livelihood. But with the shift of the marine environment due to climate change, weather phenomena (such as storms) become more intense and affect them greatly as they have limited access to concrete housing due to their nomadic living conditions.

* Key element: the Scottish government is working toward climate change goals. Scotland has held the COP 26 but the Nawken community was left out of this event, completely invisible from the conference, and barely had voices. There have been more climate summits in the world like the COP 26 but TEK were left out each time of the climate change conversation because those discussions are shaped to non-indigenous.

* For Nawken people, Nature is not a resource as seen by the non-indigenous people, they look out for indigenous. Nawken people live in a sustainable way including with their clothes, tools, shelters, nothing is wasted, as emphasized through their traditional knowledge. They help woodland restoration by collecting and contributing to the environmental goals of the Scottish government but they are never associated with regards to their contribution to climate change actions.

* Indigenous knowledge: living briefing systems of understating that need to be protected in practice, means protecting the people and places that know it.

* Want to address what he saw on the internet with the Earth healing in 2020: yes, human behaviors shift in a good way, but nevertheless the climate change crisis didn't stop. We need to stop taking TEK as a side note but as a core solution. We need to re-frame and recognize indigenous people. We need meaningful inclusion, real collaboration, and long-term management. We need to protect TEF as part of climate actions and the relationship it has with landscape is the conservation of it.

* Climate change is an issue, whose knowledge passed on, resilience refuses to push us away. We are still here. We need to stake our claims in this climate change conversation; we have the tools for it.

