

**ExCOP/Stockholm Convention COP 7, Geneva, Switzerland May 4 – May 15, 2015 Indigenous Caucus Collective Statement for Agenda Item 5 (e) Presented by Erika Apatiki of the Native Village of Gambell, St. Lawrence Island, May 7, 2015**

Thank you Madame President and Distinguished Delegates,

My name is Erika Apatiki and I am a tribal member of the Native Village of Gambell in the northern Bering Sea region of the Arctic. I am making this intervention on behalf of the Global Indigenous Peoples Caucus for the Ex-COP and Stockholm Convention COP 7. Our caucus represents Indigenous organizations, nations and peoples from the Arctic, North America, Latin America and the Pacific regions.

Indigenous Peoples continue to bear a burden that we did not create because POPs reach us from global sources, and we do not have the capacity to deal with this on our own. Our Children and Youth are the most harmed of all. In the Arctic, the levels of POPs contamination in breast milk are amongst the highest of any population on earth. Indigenous children all over the world are harmed by POPs from conception and throughout their lives. This has been recognized in the preamble of the Stockholm Convention, which says:

**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**

We know that PCP, among other POPs, is found in our traditional foods and that it can affect our learning and development. We know it harms the important work of the thyroid gland in our bodies. It can be passed from the mother to her child through breast milk even though she only wants to provide the healthiest nourishment to her baby.

We suffer adverse health disparities including disproportionately high rates of cancer, birth defects, thyroid disease, and learning disabilities. We are here to fight for the health of our children and elders - as our elder Annie Alowa said, “I will fight until I melt” for clean air, clean water, and toxic-free food. We are here to carry on this work together with you.

As we are reading this, our hunters are out in small open boats along the ice edge in the northern Bering Sea of the Arctic for our Spring bowhead whale hunt. The bowhead whale gives its life so that we have the food that we need throughout the

year, food that enriches our bodies and our spirits, which brings our community together. If we cannot hunt these animals our culture will die and we will lose our identity as a people. We understand that our subsistence foods have high levels of persistent chemicals such as pentachlorophenol and other POPs. This is such a terrible injustice and a violation of our human rights. We are here to ensure urgent and positive change.

We respectfully remind the Delegates that the issues under discussion have severe and lasting impacts **now** on Indigenous Peoples and local communities. The principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent are important for Indigenous Peoples not only under the Conventions, but also under other international mechanisms including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

For the health and well-being of our Indigenous Peoples and all peoples of the earth and our future generations, please support the initiative to list PCP in Annex A with no exemptions.

Igamsiqayugvikamsi. Thank you.