**PRESS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**: October 19, 2019

**Media contacts**: Enei Begaye Peter, 928-380-6296 [enei@NativeMovement.org](mailto:enei@NativeMovement.org) and Jody Potts 907-960-2002

**Native Youth Receive Standing Ovation as Alaska Federation of Natives Declares a State of Emergency on Climate Change**

*Young Indigenous leaders ask for urgent climate action spurring lengthy debate at AFN*

FAIRBANKS, AK - Today, a climate change resolution from First Alaskans Institute Youth & Elders conference made its way onto the floor for debate at the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) convention. The resolution highlighted the severe impacts that climate change is having on Indigenous ways of life and the spiritual and cultural well-being of Alaska Native communities. The resolution called for the creation of a climate action leadership task force within the Alaska Federation of Natives with the purpose of advancing Indigenous voices and advocating for strong climate policies that will ensure the survival of future generations. It also moved for AFN to declare a state of emergency due to climate change. The resolution passed following just over an hour of debate.

The resolution was among seven other resolutions passed at Elders & Youth and then considered at AFN. AFN resolutions represent the vote of the largest statewide Native organization in Alaska, including 191 federally recognized tribes, 171 village corporations, 12 regional corporations, and 12 regional nonprofit and tribal consortiums. Albert Kookesh, AFN Board Member, Sealaska Corporation, and former AFN co-chair said, “AFN resolutions have the full force of Alaska Native voice behind them.”

Youth delegates Nanieezh Peter (Neets’aii Gwich’in), Quannah Potts (Han Gwich’in), Zoe Okleasik (Inupiaq), and Alicyn Bahnke (Inupiaq) wrote the resolution. They attend high school in Fairbanks and Nome, and their personal experiences with climate change in their communities inspired them to take action. “We have lost due to unpredictable and unsafe ice conditions, have seen the die off and disease of seals, salmon, migratory birds, shellfish, whales, polar bears, and recognize that these are also our relatives” as a reason for the resolution. They call on their leaders to support the “survival of our future generations, ways of life, traditional lands, intact ecosystems, emotional, spiritual, and mental well-being due to Climate Change.”

Quannah Potts urged the delegates to pass the resolution, emphasizing the urgency of climate change and her deep concern for future generations: “I am an Indigenous youth. We are not here to fight with our own people. We shouldn’t have to worry about our future generations, about our children and grandchildren...This is important, this is our life, this is our future.”

When an AFN delegate moved to amend the resolution to include language regarding non-renewable resource development, Nanieezh Peter stated “we would like to strike the amendment...as it would not be supportive of the resolution we originally offered.” Quannah and Nanieezh, and other AFN delegates expressed their desire to pass the resolution unamended.

Victor Joseph, Chief/Chairman of the Tanana Chiefs Conference, spoke passionately in favor of the resolution and called attention to the resolution’s focus to establish a leadership taskforce to advocate for strong climate policies. He said, “We should not be scared of that! We’re stewards of the land! An elder, an awardee who was recognized said ‘You take care of the land, it will take care of you’ I believe that powerful statement… let’s honor these young people who stood up...” which elicited a spontaneous standing ovation across the Carlson Center arena.

The two youth co-authors from Nome who couldn’t be present for the debate later expressed their appreciation for it’s passage. Alycin Bahnke said that the climate leadership task force will be an important step in the right direction: “Having an AFN leadership task force for us not only supports us but should help us get our voices out there and help us change things around the state to lessen climate change.” Zoe Okleasik said: “The main reason I'm concerned about climate change up here in the Norton Sound is that our sea ice is melting. Every year the ice stays for a shorter and shorter amount of time and the ice isn't getting as thick as it used to. Our hunters need the sea ice to be able to crab. In May of 2018 a lot of people here in Nome lost crab pots and they weren't able to feed their families. We need people to be concerned about climate change because we need to be able to use the resources our land provides for us and we can't if the temperatures in the sea continues to rise.”

Indigenous youth around Alaska have been at the forefront of a growing statewide, national and international climate justice movement. Just last week, 16 Alaskan youth plaintiffs in *Sinnok v. Alaska* were heard by the Alaska Supreme Court in a packed courtroom, filled with young Alaskans and supporters. Esau Sinnok from Shishmaref, the lead plaintiff, spoke in favor of the AFN resolution today: “Young people are the leaders of today and the leaders of tomorrow. We do have the voice and the opportunity and the brainpower and strength to do the actual work....We can’t just say oh we’ll do this next week, we can’t think like that because my one and only home is being eaten by the sea. It’s very important to talk about climate change now. It’s urgent right now.”

Youth-led climate strikes have taken place across Alaska in recent months in coordination with an international youth climate movement that emphasizes the urgency of global action on climate change, and both Zoe and Nanieezh organized climate strikes in their communities. Nanieezh Peter, one of the youth authors of the resolution, was encouraged to see it pass: “Thank you everyone who supported the resolution. The declaration of a state of emergency sends the clear message that this is urgent, that this is only a beginning step, and now we need to act and follow through in unity. We need you!”

Learn more at <https://www.defendthesacredalaska.org/>, [https://nativemovement.org](https://www.nativemovement.org/)

Link to the Elders and Youth Resolutions: <https://secureservercdn.net/198.71.233.161/ekq.405.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/EY-Resolutions-to-AFN19.pdf>

*Native Movement is an Alaska based Indigenous-led non-profit organization with Alaska Native leadership from throughout the state.*

PRESS COVERAGE

* + - **ADN article** <https://www.adn.com/alaska-news/2019/10/20/afn-declares-state-of-emergency-for-climate-change/>
      * This article links to the 2 climate change resolutions which passed: 19-56 and 19-61: (note that some others were revised during the deliberations, especially of interest 19-57).
    - **Zoe and Alicyn interview** <https://www.knom.org/wp/blog/2019/12/16/caught-doing-something-good-alicyn-bahnke-and-zoe-okleasik/>
    - Nat Herz <https://www.alaskapublic.org/2019/10/30/alaskas-top-environmental-watchdog-state-is-tackling-global-warming-but-its-not-an-emergency/>
    - Dermot Cole <https://www.arctictoday.com/at-alaska-federation-of-natives-a-generational-divide-marks-the-arctic-climate-change-debate/>
    - Arctic Sounder editorial re subsistence and climate change <http://www.thearcticsounder.com/article/1943playing_the_save_subsistence_card_underhanded>
    - <https://www.ktuu.com/content/news/AFN-declares-climate-change-state-of-emergency-563502941.html>

* + - **Youth Climate Justice Op-Ed:** <http://www.newsminer.com/opinion/community_perspectives/local-youths-lead-a-growing-alaska-climate-justice-movement/article_6d4e5f30-ee2b-11e9-8063-1bd71947789d.html>
    - **Nome**
      * <http://www.nomenugget.com/news/nome-students-go-strike-demand-climate-action>
      * <http://www.thearcticsounder.com/article/1941nome_students_hold_climate_strike_urge_others>
      * <https://www.knom.org/wp/blog/2019/10/03/nome-teenagers-protest-for-awareness-of-climate-change-urge-adults-to-act/>
    - <https://www.ktoo.org/2019/10/21/pushed-by-young-people-afn-declares-a-climate-emergency/?fbclid=IwAR0hHh0aaITF6OzU-233eCOaQBJkBeI__VG3mXUCkJ2ZEGFhn1Br7HDixio>
    - Alaska Native News <https://alaska-native-news.com/native-youth-receive-standing-ovation-as-alaska-federation-of-natives-declares-a-state-of-emergency-on-climate-change/45283/>
    - Delta <https://deltadiscovery.com/native-youth-receive-standing-ovation-as-afn-declares-a-state-of-emergency-on-climate-change/>
    - AP <https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/business/article236475073.html>
    - <https://www.alaskapublic.org/2019/10/21/pushed-by-youths-afn-declares-a-climate-emergency/>

* + - <http://www.newsminer.com/news/alaska_news/alaska-native-convention-passes-climate-change-declaration/article_77815250-1b0d-5059-86b9-2871e611b735.html>

* + - Elders and Youth Resolutions Submitted to AFN <https://secureservercdn.net/198.71.233.161/ekq.405.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/EY-Resolutions-to-AFN19.pdf>