INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’ CONTRIBUTIONS TO UNDERSTANDING GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

Report on CINE Symposium
October 15, 2003

Background
Fall, 2003, was the tenth anniversary of the opening of the Centre for Indigenous Peoples’ Nutrition and Environment (CINE) on the Macdonald Campus of McGill University. The Chair of the CINE Governing Board, Chief Bill Erasmus, suggested that it was a good time to hold a university-based symposium in celebration of the event, and to invite Aboriginal People from across Canada, as well as the many friends and colleagues of CINE.

The opportunity for holding a symposium was stimulated by the suggestion that CINE have a satellite meeting to the International Congress held at McGill, entitled "Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change (HDGEC)," October 16-19. As well, the dates of the HDGEC Congress overlapped with World Food Day, October 16. It was therefore decided to hold the CINE Symposium on October 15, the day before the opening of HDGEC and World Food Day, thus drawing on the advertising and potential participants of that meeting, as well. The name of the Symposium became "Indigenous Peoples Contributions to Understanding Global Environmental Change." Notice of the event was circulated through CINE Governing Board organizations to their communities, and broadly through CINE networks.

Program Development
Ideas for the one-day program were solicited from the professors based at CINE and members of the CINE Governing Board. The intention for the program was to have a series of academic speakers known among the Aboriginal community as excellent in their techniques for participatory research, and to invite leaders within
the CINE Governing Board, Canadian Aboriginal leaders in Canada’s health sector (NAHO and IAPH of the CIHR), and participants from government familiar with the work of CINE (Health Canada, DIAND, IDRC). We also invited three external international agency representatives important to the CINE mission: the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues of the UN Economic and Social Council, the International Plant Genetics Resources Institute, and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

It was to be a day for academic presentations, learning with our friends, and having fun as well. The aboriginal host for CINE, the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake, contributed the opening and closing ceremonies guided by Chief Billy Two Rivers. Entertainment was provided by the Eastern Door Dancers and Nukariit, a duo of Inuit throat singers. A catered lunch was provided by White Raven, an Inuit catering service from Ottawa.

We thank Leslie Ann LeDuke, Dina Spigelski, Marion Roche, and several volunteers for assisting the arrangements for the day.

**Attendance**

Approximately 150 people attended the symposium. Registrations fees included lunch, with reduced fees for students. There were many campus students and staff who joined us for portions of the day, depending on their other commitments. Students and staff from McGill and Macdonald were the greatest in numbers. There were a few participants from the HDGEC registrants. Several dozen aboriginal participants attended from Kahnawake, Ottawa, the Arctic and British Columbia. We also had international registrants from Hawaii, India, Norway, and Italy.

**Program Itinerary**

Following registration at 8:45 am, the program began promptly at 9.00 am, with a traditional Mohawk opening ceremony conducted by Chief Billy Two Rivers. The moderators for the morning program were Chief Bill Erasmus and Prof. Harriet Kuhnlein. Greetings were brought to the audience from Dr. Diane Mather, Associate Dean of Research on the Macdonald Campus, in which she emphasized the important role CINE has on campus. Prof. Harriet Kuhnlein then gave an introduction to the symposium, emphasizing the 10 years of CINE’s activities, meaning of
the CINE logo in relation to our mission, and interactions with the CINE Governing Board. Following the introduction, Chief Erasmus described his perspectives on environmental change among the Dene, interactions with CINE since the first projects with the Sahtú Dene, activities to find funding for establishment of the Centre. Violet Ford, Canadian Vice President of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (University of Lapland) and Stephanie Meakin presented on the Inuit understanding of environmental change and the difficulties faced in understanding the impact of knowledge of contaminants on the Inuit.

After a brief refreshment break in which the audience was invited to visit the approximately 15 posters, or view the CINE videos, the program resumed. Prof. Laurie H.M. Chan CINE and colleagues Valerie Assinewe CINE and Scot Nickels (Environment Department, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami) presented under the topic of "Climate Change as an Influence on Indigenous Peoples’ Food Resources." This was followed by two academic presentations from Western Canadian Scholars. Prof. Nancy Turner (University of Victoria, School of Environmental Studies) described her work on Indigenous Peoples’ conservation with a presentation entitled "Not One Single Berry: Indigenous Knowledge of Environmental Change in British Columbia." Prof. Milton M.R. Freeman (Canadian Circumpolar Institute, University of Alberta) presented on "Food for Thought (and Other Important Purposes)."

The catered lunch by White Raven Caterers (Ottawa) was preceded by the Mohawk Eastern Door Dancers who did several dances and involved the audience. Following the lunch, the Nukariit Throat Singers (Ottawa) gave a pleasing performance enjoyed by all.

The afternoon program was moderated by Chief Erasmus and Prof. Tim Johns (CINE). The topic "Perspectives of Government on Indigenous Peoples’ Issues with Global Environmental Change: Canadian Initiatives" was addressed by short presentations of: a) Sharon Lee Smith representing Hon. Ethel Blondin-Andrew, Health Canada; b) Doris Cook of the CIHR Institute of Aboriginal Peoples’ Health; c) Richard Jock of the National Aboriginal Health Organization; and d) Scot Nickels presenting on behalf of Rus Shearer of the Northern Contaminants Program, INAC. The afternoon continued with two half-hour academic presentations
within the topic "Understanding Global Issues of Food Biodiversity and Health of Indigenous Peoples:" Dr. Pablo Ezyaguirre of the International Plant Genetics Resources Institute (Rome) gave a presentation, "Role of Indigenous Peoples Linking Food Culture to Plant Diversity" and Prof. T. Kue Young (Univ. Toronto) on "Diabetes, Nutrition and the Environment – Is There a Connection?"

Following a refreshment break, the speaker’s program continued with "Perspectives and Initiatives of International Agencies on Indigenous Peoples’ Issue, with presentations by a) Olivier Jalbert (Secretariat, Convention on Biological Diversity, Montreal, and the UN Environment Programme, Nairobi), b) Mililani Trask (Pacific Representative to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Hilo), and c) Daniel Buckles (International Development Research Centre, Ottawa). Prof. Grace Egeland concluded late in the afternoon with brief comments, "Back to the Future: Traditional Knowledge and Scientific Discovery." Chief Billy Two Rivers gave the traditional Mohawk closing to the program.

**Highlights**

The first highlight of the symposium was the striking poster prepared by Helen Rimmer (McGill University) that captured the Arctic and international aspects of CINE, and participation with the CINE Governing Board. Posters were available for all those assisting with the arrangements for the day, and were presented as gifts to speakers. Speakers also had gifts of wooden plaques carved with the CINE logo. In addition, participants could view the CINE videos and have one of the CINE posters which were available at the registration desk.

The opening and closing of the Symposium by Chief Billy Two Rivers with traditional Mohawk greetings and prayer helped the audience to orient to the work of CINE with Aboriginal People.

At the noon break, before lunch, the Eastern Door Dancers performed several dances in full regalia, and had the audience join in a Friendship Dance—which was thoroughly enjoyable. Following lunch of sandwiches and Arctic treats (fish and caribou) the Inuit throat singers gave a concert of several songs, including the surprise rendition of "Happy Birthday to CINE."

The academic speakers contributed a great deal of food for thought, and representatives from the Government of Canada and
international agencies presented excellent perspective on CINE’s role and place for research with Indigenous People internationally. Although it was quite a long day, all agree that it was highly successful.

Our program noted thanks to the following sponsors (in alphabetical order): Assembly of First Nations, Canadian Institutes of Health Research - Institute of Aboriginal Peoples’ Health, Centre for Indigenous Peoples’ Nutrition and Environment, Council of Yukon First Nations, Dene Nation, Health Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, International Development Research Centre, International Plant Genetics Resources Institute, Inuit Circumpolar Conference, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, McGill University, Mohawk Council of Kahnawake, National Aboriginal Health Organization, New Sun Fund Administered by the Community Foundation of Ottawa, United Nations Economic and Social Council – Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and the United Nations Environment Programme – Convention on Biological Diversity.

The final program is posted on the CINE website, (www.cine.mcgill.ca)

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