



Sheila Watt-Cloutier

The Right to be Cold

For Sheila Watt-Cloutier, climate change is personal. Very personal.

The Nobel Peace Prize nominee and honored advocate for indigenous culture in the Arctic views herself as less of an environmentalist and more of a human rights activist.

The Far North is ground zero for climate change on the planet—warming at a rate faster than the rest of the globe. That rapid change is radically altering life for the 155,000 residents of the circumpolar region, destroying communities' rights to life, culture, health, property and means of subsistence.

“We must now speak environment, economy, foreign policy, health and human rights in the same breath,” Watt-Cloutier says. “Everything is connected. Most people can’t relate to the science and technical aspects of climate change, but they can certainly connect to the human aspect—the key is to move the issue from the head to the heart.”

A life-long resident of Iqaluit, Nunavut in northern Quebec, Watt-Cloutier has done more than any other champion who has given voice to the concerns of her people, speaking from a position of strength, not victimhood. And, the world has taken notice.

In 1995, Watt-Cloutier was elected to the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC), a cross-border assembly of residents of Canada, Greenland, Alaska, and the far east of Russia. She played a key role in U.N. negotiations to ban organic pollutants, a class of poisonous chemicals that were building up in Arctic waters. As chair of the ICC for five years, she campaigned relentlessly against the causes of climate change—even petitioning the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights with a claim that the U.S. violated Inuit rights by failing to curb emissions.

Watt-Cloutier received the inaugural Global Environment Award from the World Association of Non-Governmental Organizations, the 2004 Aboriginal Achievement Award for the Environment, the 2005 United Nations Champion of the Earth Award and the Sophie Prize in Norway.

The list of acknowledgements goes much further. Global Green USA—the American branch of Mikhail Gorbachev’s Green Cross International—selected her for its International Environmental Leadership Award and she received both the Citation of Lifetime Achievement from the Canadian Environment Awards and the Earth Day Canada International Environment Award. Watt-Cloutier was made an Officer in the Order of Canada in 2006—the highest civilian honor in the nation.

Nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by the parliament of Norway, she was presented with the Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Award by U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon. Named a *Time Magazine* Hero of the Environment, she was also tapped as one of the “25 transformational Canadians” by the Toronto Globe and Mail and CTV. The Canada Post chose her as one of four “Canadians who made a difference.” She received the Rachel Carson Prize in 2007 and was made a member of the Commission on Arctic Climate Change led by The Aspen Institute.

To top it off, she has been memorialized with her own stamp in 2012, the country’s Jubilee Year.

“I do nothing more than remind the world that the Arctic is not a barren land devoid of life, but a rich and majestic land that has supported our resilient culture for millennia,” she says. “Even though small in number and living far from the corridors of power, it appears that the wisdom of the land strikes a universal chord on a planet where many are searching for sustainability.”

Her upcoming book, *The Right to be Cold*, will be published in Fall 2013.