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SUMMARY RECORD

THIRTIETH REGULAR SESSION OF THE COUNCIL

Public Session

Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC)

29 June 2023

Victoria, British Columbia, Canada



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29 June 2023
Fairmont Empress Hotel, Victoria, British Columbia

SUMMARY RECORD FOR PUBLIC SESSION

Welcoming Remarks and Introduction of Video on CEC’s Accomplishments

The CEC Executive Director, Jorge Daniel Taillant, opened the meeting by welcoming the public, the Council representatives and the delegations from the three countries to the CEC’s 30th Council Session. He began by acknowledging the traditional territory of the Lekwungen (le-KWUNG-en) Peoples, the Songhees (“song-eez”) and Esquimalt (“es-KWIE-malt”) Nations, and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to live, learn and share on this territory.

He continued stating that the gathering was not merely to review progress by the CEC on the CEC’s mandate, but also that we were facing a climate emergency and had a collective responsibility to act now and do more. We need to conserve better, act to preserve and restore ecosystems so that they can help the planet heal, and that is what the CEC is about. He pointed out that Indigenous peoples were right about the value and importance of nature, and how harmony with nature is the key to long-term sustainability. He emphasized that we must also identify those natural solutions to warming that can cool our environments, make them stronger, and confront the impacts of climate change. Finally, he emphasized that, concurrently by 2030, we urgently need to reduce the emission of pollutants like methane, black carbon and HFCs, which will bring immediate benefits to climate and human health.

Pointing to the theme of the 2023 Council Session—Indigenous and Urban Approaches to Climate Adaptation—he mentioned that the discussion during the public session would focus on: 1) how through Indigenous and traditional ecological knowledge we can learn to better steward our environment; 2) how it can help us strengthen our adaptive capacity to climate change; and 3) how through engagement with communities in urban environments we can better respond to climate impacts and find solutions to the challenges faced by most vulnerable residents. The discussion will also address critical issues such as environmental justice and climate equity, public policy, planning and management on environment and climate, youth engagement, and much more.

The Executive Director then introduced the video of CEC's accomplishments since the 2022 Council Session in Mexico. The video highlights how the expanded trinational work program responds to planetary crises, and the unique value of the CEC in creating networks and bringing people together to tackle our collective challenges, develop tools and resources to better understand environmental data, and make information available to the public at-large. It also portrays our actions to raise awareness and foster positive environmental action, and how we facilitate public engagement to help empower communities, particularly Indigenous communities and marginalized and underserved communities, which are on the frontlines of climate change and need our concerted efforts.

Executive Director Taillant then introduced Lisa Helps, former two-term Mayor of the City of Victoria, the facilitator for the Dialogue with the Council, and experts from the three countries on Indigenous and Urban Approaches to Climate Adaptation. After emphasizing Ms. Helps’ areas of

expertise in economic development and prosperity, housing, climate action, resilient infrastructure and reconciliation, he turned the floor over to her.

Introduction to the Dialogue session

Lisa Helps welcomed everyone, including the remote audience joining from across North America. Before beginning with the introductions, she acknowledged the traditional territory of the Lekwungen (le-KWUNG-en) Peoples, the Songhees (“song-eez”) and Esquimalt (“es-KWIE-malt”) Nations. She also greeted the Council members: Minister Guilbeault of Canada, Deputy Administrator McCabe of the United States, and Undersecretary Rico of Mexico. She also welcomed the three experts: 1) Jaime Donatuto, an environmental social scientist who has been working with Indigenous communities for more than 20 years and is a long-standing staff member of the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, located in the US Pacific Northwest; 2) José Inés Loría Palma of the community of San Crisanto, Yucatán, Mexico, who has initiated and managed the restoration of local mangroves; and 3) Skw’akw’as (meaning Sunshine) Dunstan-Moore, from Tlekemstin also known as Lytton in British Columbia, who carries many responsibilities as a youth, including being co-chair of the Environment and Climate Change Youth Council.

Ms. Helps then briefly outlined the format of the Dialogue session and the ways for the public to submit questions. She mentioned that the dialogue will also showcase short videos received from the public, expressing how they or their community members are taking action and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

Interventions by the Council members, experts and rapporteurs

The facilitator introduced three overarching questions for the dialogue: 1) What best practices can be used to ensure community participation in the identification of climate adaptation needs and solutions? 2) How can we leverage nature-based solutions to meet our climate adaptation goals? 3) How can climate adaptation solutions for cities consider Indigenous perspectives?

She then invited Minister Guilbeault to provide examples of Indigenous and urban approaches to climate adaptation in Canada.

Minister Guilbeault began by stating that public sessions play a crucial role in the work of the CEC and reinforce cooperation among the three countries as they give us the opportunity to speak about what each country is doing to tackle the environmental challenges. They also allow governments to listen to what the public has to say on the most critical environmental issues facing the North American region. As our nations work together to respond to the environmental issues we face, we also need to work together with all partners, he said. And in our response, approaches taken by Indigenous Peoples and by urban areas will be instrumental in adapting to climate change, he added.

He then mentioned that in developing its first-ever National Adaptation Strategy, Canada made sure to consult all governments, Indigenous partners, the private sector, adaptation experts, and youth. With this strategy—which had been officially launched earlier that week—Canada aims to build climate resilience across Canada, to get better prepared for the climate of the 21st century. The plan for climate resilience that was created includes everyone, particularly the country’s most vulnerable communities, because these communities are disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change.

He provided the example of the Parks Canada pilot project, “We All Take Care of the Harvest,” which is a collaborative project with the First Nations Health Authority, four coastal First Nations communities, and the BC Centre for Disease Control. It addresses seafood safety, security, and sovereignty challenges in a changing climate. The project delivers community-based monitoring programs and harmful algal bloom early-warning systems to inform harvest decisions and provide adaptation tools to climate risks.

Minister Guilbeault then noted that the federal government is working on a proposed national urban park in the Greater Victoria Region, and that the vision is that of an Indigenous-led national urban park that contains Indigenous protected and conserved areas.

He also mentioned the recent release of an updated Government of Canada Adaptation Action Plan that outlines how Canada will achieve its climate-adaptation objectives. The Action Plan lists nearly 70 new and ongoing initiatives to help meet our priorities. For example: 1) Reducing the risks of wildfire in our communities by investing up to \$284 million over five years to enhance community prevention and mitigation activities; 2) Supporting community-based adaptation initiatives in collaboration with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities through a \$530 million investment in the Green Municipal Fund; and 3) Building climate-resilient infrastructure to help communities address climate change disasters by investing nearly \$3.9 billion since 2018 in the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund.

Minister Guilbeault underlined how these initiatives emphasize the need for cooperation between all governments and for Indigenous climate leadership. To ensure that communities adapt as well as possible, he said we need to draw on the traditional ecological knowledge of Indigenous Peoples who know the land better than anyone else. He also mentioned that in Canada’s 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan and Budget 2022, \$29 million was committed to work with Indigenous partners to advance Indigenous climate leadership. Canada is currently working with First Nations in British Columbia to identify how to support their self-determined climate action better. Over the next two years, Canada will also collaborate with the BC Assembly of First Nations and engage with communities to develop recommendations.

The facilitator thanked Minister Guilbeault and turned to Deputy Administrator McCabe to share about what is taking place in the United States.

Deputy Administrator McCabe said that the Biden administration has made climate adaptation and environmental justice two of the United States’ top priorities, recognizing that climate change disproportionately affects communities that have been historically underserved. The Biden administration also recognizes Indigenous Knowledge (also known as Traditional Ecological Knowledge) as one of the many important bodies of knowledge contributing to the scientific, technical, social, and economic advancements of the United States and the collective understanding of the natural world in our decision-making. She then stressed that the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is working to ensure that climate adaptation and resilience are integrated into all aspects of the EPA’s work, from permitting and enforcement to research and data analysis. In October 2022, EPA issued 20 adaptation implementation plans, including each major program office and region, committing to hundreds of actions that will help ensure the programs, policies and investments will be effective even as the climate changes, and will support states, tribes, territories, local governments, communities, and other federal agencies, as they build adaptive capacity and strengthen the resilience of the nation.

Deputy Administrator McCabe gave as an example the work that the EPA is conducting to ensure that the investments of funds from President Biden’s Investing in America agenda promote resilience to climate change. These efforts include the Brownfields Program, which will require that all grantees consider climate impacts (such as sea-level rise and flooding) as they revitalize the sites. Additionally, she pointed out that the Superfund program will provide guidance to EPA regions on considering climate resilience throughout the process of remedy selection and implementation at these hazardous sites. Also, the EPA’s Air Program regularly provides funding to monitor and protect the quality of air that has become increasingly polluted as a result of climate-driven wildfires. The water program aims to improve the resilience of America’s water infrastructure and deploy grant and loan programs to advance climate objectives. Finally, the Urban Waters Program, which was created to assist urban areas, particularly under-served communities, in connecting with their waterways and working to improve them, is actively tackling such issues as water quality and monitoring, erosion, stormwater control, and integrating climate adaptation strategies.

Deputy Administrator McCabe then briefly shared a few examples of the climate adaptation work that EPA is doing on Indigenous and Urban settings. She explained that EPA provides funding opportunities to empower tribes to develop and implement climate resilience projects, such as infrastructure improvements, land and water management strategies, renewable energy initiatives, and community engagement programs. In addition to the financial assistance, EPA also provides technical assistance to tribes to develop their climate adaptation plans. These plans address each community’s unique challenges, while incorporating traditional knowledge, cultural values and scientific data, to implement strategies that will build resilience. In addition, EPA is working on incorporating Indigenous Knowledge that promotes environmental sustainability and responsible use of natural resources in our environmental and climate change policies. Finally, she mentioned that EPA will continue supporting Indigenous and underserved communities by providing the tools and resources for adapting and build resilience to the increasingly destructive impacts of climate change.

The facilitator thanked Deputy Administrator McCabe and turned to Undersecretary Ivan Rico, inviting him to speak on how Mexico is setting an example on climate adaptation work in Indigenous and urban communities.

The Undersecretary emphasized the significance of preserving the great biocultural diversity in Mexico and incorporating diverse perspectives into adaptation efforts. He cited Mexico's experience with the "Regional Forums for Adaptation to Climate Change" as an example and also gave a brief overview of the national regulations guiding Mexico's adaptation efforts. The Mexican government recognizes and guarantees the rights of Indigenous Peoples and communities to self-determination and autonomy, as mandated in the Constitution. Mexico is a multicultural nation, with Indigenous Peoples who descend from populations that inhabited the territory.

Further, the General Climate Change Act outlines Mexico’s national climate change policy that prioritizes human rights, including the rights of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities, and persons in vulnerable situations. Gender equality, women's empowerment, and intergenerational equity are also prioritized. The Sectoral Program for the Environment and Natural Resources (Promarnat) 2020–2024 promotes the participation of women, young people, and Indigenous and Afro-Mexican peoples and communities.

The Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) include an adaptation component, Axis A, to prevent and address negative impacts on human populations and territories. Indigenous and Afro-Mexican peoples, who often live in high-risk areas and face poverty and marginalization, are

particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change in Mexico. In fact, one of the main activities implemented during 2022 by Semarnat was the development of seven regional fora, involving social participation, solidarity organization and collaboration, and knowledge dialogue in Mexican communities, to accelerate action for adaptation to climate change while maintaining respect for human rights and the principle of a just transition.

These fora will involve incorporating work by various federal institutions: the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (INPI), the Welfare Secretariat, the National Institute of Ecology and Climate Change (INECC), civil society, local communities, local governments, academia and the private sector.

He continued, saying that Mexico attaches great importance to a human rights-based approach that respects and includes the integration of traditional knowledge in the development of public policies and programs, which in turn contributes to a comprehensive response to climate change, the loss of biodiversity, while enhancing the link between culture and nature and ensuring the integration of a gender perspective.

Semarnat follows closely the work carried out by the Indigenous communities under the aegis of the CEC. Among these initiatives, he highlighted the "Communities for Environmental Justice Network" and "Environmental Education" that is under development and that Mexico hopes can benefit from the participation of CEC's Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group.

Mexico is committed to strengthening the adaptive capacity of North American communities and reducing their vulnerability to the negative impacts of climate change.

As he concluded his remarks, Undersecretary Rico emphasized Mexico's commitment to the principle of "leaving no one behind, leaving no one outside," which advocates respect for Indigenous Peoples, their customs, and their right to self-determination, and the preservation of their territories. Mexico's climate policy also values substantive equality between women and men, the dignity of older adults, and young people's right to a better future. He recognizes and supports the ongoing trilateral cooperation work to comprehensively integrate Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and expertise.

Lisa Helps thanked the Council members for the great examples they provided and then turned to the invited experts from Canada, Mexico and the United States to hear their perspectives.

She first asked Jaime Donatuto (United States) to answer the following question:

What best practices can be used to support and incentivize community participation in the identification of climate adaptation needs and solutions? And more specifically, how can underserved/disadvantaged populations be encouraged to participate? And from your perspective...how can solutions help reduce inequality and make sure that no one is left behind?

Ms. Donatuto began explaining that for Coast Salish Elders, plants, such as the rose, are our teachers. Plants adapt, communicate, model generosity, and are resilient to challenging situations. These values are inherent in Indigenous cultures. In Swinomish and other Coast Salish Nations, youth are taught social and emotional skills via examples of plants. For instance, in aboriginal lore, the rose represents love and protection, she said.

She then recommended a few wise practices for engaging Indigenous communities based on the teachings about the rose:

- 1) Learn about the history of Indigenous wisdom as it relates to the region where you seek to connect before you ask to meet. Gain an understanding of the rose—both the flower and the thorns;
- 2) Seek out Indigenous organizations in place of academic institutions to help build relationships with “sub-actors” (as we are called in the recent Government Advisory Committee (GAC) letter to the US EPA!). In the United States, these “sub-actors” could be the National Congress of American Indians, the Institute for Tribal Environment Professionals, or the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians. These are examples of organizations that understand and reflect the teachings of the rose. We have established longstanding, mutually respectful relationships with these organization and we trust them to help us set boundaries of self-protection.
- 3) Once those connections are made, ask what the community priorities are and how you may be able to aid them in achieving their initiatives, rather than asking them to be part of a project that they didn’t create themselves. Step back and allow the communities to lead and realize that unquestioned acceptance of your ideas may not be what works for others, but instead, respecting their worldviews as well as their boundaries may be required.
- 4) Push for the promulgation of policies and regulations that equitably place Indigenous knowledge as a foundation for decision making.

While Ms. Donatuto readily admitted that she is not proficient in the legislation of British Columbia, she said that she had recently heard about Action 4.48 in the Action Plan of British Columbia’s Declaration Act, which states that “Work with the B.C. Indigenous Advisory Council on Agriculture and Food, and other Indigenous partners, to identify opportunities to strengthen Indigenous food systems and increase Indigenous participation in the agriculture and food sector,” had successfully supported Indigenous-led initiatives for rebuilding marine and clam gardens. Clam gardens are an ancient Indigenous technology, used from Alaska through British Columbia and into Washington State, that consist of a low rock wall, which can only be seen when the tide is far out. It levels out the beach above, providing more habitat for clams and other near shore species. These areas have higher density and encourages more beach biodiversity than similar beaches with marine gardens. Those ancestors knew what they were doing. These are truly sustainable practices that work with our natural world, not against it. Ms. Donatuto added that the rock walls can move with rising and falling sea levels. In fact, archaeology and carbon dating has validated what the Coast Salish people already knew: that the rocks from the marine gardens [which were moved] just a short distance have been in active use for over 3,500 years and have been moved several times during that period.

The Facilitator thanked Ms. Donatuto for these great recommendations and turned to José Inés Loría Palma (Mexico) and asked him the following question:

Building on your experience and community leadership in San Crisanto, how can we leverage nature-based solutions in our climate adaptation goals?

Mr. Loría began by emphasizing the importance of humanity’s relationship with nature, and how what we do related to it can benefit us. He explained that the people in San Crisanto (Yucatán, Mexico) came to this realization because there were no birds or fish in the mangrove. This had been caused by road and infrastructure modernization efforts that did not properly address drainage issues. When roads are built without proper drainage, they can function like dams, as happened in San Crisanto. In 1995, two hurricanes struck the region within less than two weeks of each other. The hurricanes brought an unusual amount of rain, which caused widespread flooding due to a lack of drainage out into the mangroves. The community decided to construct a drainage system alongside the highway bordering the mangrove forest, allowing floodwaters to drain and flow naturally into the mangroves and out into the sea. During this work, the community also cleared blockages out of the culverts. This significantly increased the quantity of freshwater fish, prawns, and crocodiles in the cenotes after just

a few months. These successes motivated the community to create a sustainable development program to restore mangroves and recover local biodiversity. The San Crisanto Foundation was formally established in 2001 to support the conservation activities that the *ejido* had initiated.

The Foundation and the *ejido* now work closely together and are functionally interdependent. The Foundation is based on three main principles that are integrated into all its activities. First, it is committed to remaining independent of any political party, government, or religious affiliation. Second, it emphasizes ethical dealings in its work and prioritizes sharing benefits amongst its members. Lastly, it strives to operate as a democratic organization, so all decisions are based on consensus. To create a framework and timeline for achieving its goals and objectives, the Foundation, in collaboration with the San Crisanto Community Council, has created a strategic plan for 2009 to 2029 which will serve as a visioning tool to guide local development activities over these two decades.

By leveraging their knowledge from ancient Mayan traditions, the community identified and diversified its income opportunities, ensuring sustained economic stability throughout the seasons. Since the Foundation's establishment, more than 11 kilometers of canals have been restored, and 45 cenotes have been delisted and rehabilitated. As a result, the flood risk has been reduced and populations and diversity of endemic wildlife in the cenotes and mangrove forests have increased. Restoration efforts have generated 60 jobs and local household incomes have increased substantially. The community has experienced rapid growth in recent decades, with its population increasing from 22 families in the 1970s to over 150 today.

The Foundation focuses on community education and awareness-raising, emphasizing the value of wetland and mangrove conservation for local livelihoods and as a natural buffer against flooding. Since 2005, the Foundation has invested more than US\$100,000 in environmental education and workshops (in biodiversity conservation, environmental care and management of municipal solid waste, gender equity, and community development). Workshops are strategically held at schools to target young members of the community.

Mr. Loría concluded by saying that the project's success resulted from many years of hard work and perseverance by the community. Today, the *ejido* is proud to pioneer the first blue carbon project at a national level which paves the way for future work by other communities in Latin America.

Ms. Helps thanked Mr. Loría Palma and turned to the last invited expert, Skw'akw'as Dunstan-Moore (Canada) stating she was young and a great example of engagement for her Indigenous community. She then asked her the following question:

We know climate change is impacting many Indigenous urban citizens. Please tell us from your perspective, how can climate adaptation solutions in cities consider Indigenous perspectives?

Ms. Skw'akw'as began by recalling the Cherry Creek wildfire that struck her community on 29 June 2021. She recognized the sacrifice youth are encountering in fighting the climate crisis—an aspect that is not always acknowledged by all.

She began by providing examples of how Indigenous Peoples practice climate adaptation through their knowledge, connection, and adaptation to the land. These practices include burning the land before the hot season to reduce the risk of wildfires, understanding the patterns of fishing, crabbing, and lobster seasons, and knowing how and when to harvest in order to access traditional medicines while preserving them.

She said that Indigenous People 10,000 years ago perhaps did not know how to fish or prevent wildfires but learned from reading natural signs and being on the land. She acknowledged the urgent need to address the triple planetary crisis of plastic waste, climate change, and biodiversity loss and said that adaptation is no longer a matter of learning, but of survival. Ms. Skw'akw'as recognized several solutions proposed in Canada's Climate Action Plan, which she had discussed during a consultation with the First Nations Canada Joint Committee on Climate Action and ECCC. She emphasized the importance of systemic change to ensure sustainable, and advocated for the protection of Indigenous rights by all levels of government. Implementing climate policies and programs and the assurance of free prior and informed consent are crucial steps toward advancing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.

Lisa Helps thanked Skw'akw'as for her inspiring intervention. She then invited the Chair of the CEC's Joint Public Advisory Committee, Octaviana Trujillo, of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe of Arizona, to come to the podium and report on the public forum on Indigenous approaches to climate adaptation held the day before.

Report from the JPAC public forum on Indigenous approaches to climate adaptation by the JPAC Chair

JPAC Chairperson Octaviana Trujillo began by reporting that the JPAC Public Forum had served as an opportunity to learn about several community and Indigenous-driven solutions to the current climate crisis and some of the conditions needed for success. The event began with the land acknowledgement of the traditional territory of the Lekwungen Peoples, the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, followed by a traditional Lekwungen Ceremony led by Florence Dick, a highly regarded member of the Songhees Nation.

Her intervention was followed by a call to action from the CEC Executive Director, who noted that addressing CO₂ emissions is not enough. We need to tackle short live pollutants, he noted, and we also need to mitigate, but also adapt, and to come together to address impacts that are being felt across our three countries as a result of climate change. He underscored the CEC's importance in engaging with Indigenous communities and youth in our three nations.

The JPAC Public forum also benefitted by the participation of Miles G. Richardson, Chair, University of Victoria's National Consortium for Indigenous Economic Development, who gave the keynote presentation. He began by expressing how honored and grateful he was to have been welcomed by a member of the Songhee Nation. He noted that Ms. Dick's intervention helped ground everyone and allowed participants to understand better where we are, physically, and what values and concerns are important to the people of this land. He highlighted the need for TEK and Western science in addressing the challenges of our times, and the importance of working and building a future together. He underscored the importance of Indigenous-led conservation and how the government of Canada's commitment goes in the right direction and could serve as a model for other nations.

His keynote was followed by the first session on *Climate Adaptation in North America: Learning from Indigenous Communities*, that brought together Indigenous community leaders from Canada, Mexico and the United States to showcase climate adaptation stories from each of the three countries and share their experiences and unique perspectives on climate change: how it is impacting their communities and how they approach climate adaptation to build community resilience.

Key highlights included:

- The importance of learning from nature and mimicking it as we design our social relationships. TEK is about the social innovations that can allow us to live more humanely.
- Our relationship with Mother Earth should be based on love and respect, and land management should follow a holistic approach.
- The importance of supporting and reinforcing the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous representatives through trust.

The second session of the JPAC Public Forum focused on *Integrating TEK and Indigenous Perspectives into Climate Adaptation Policy and Planning*, and our invited speakers discussed the critical role of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in shaping effective climate adaptation policies and planning efforts. The session also highlighted case studies where Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and Indigenous perspectives were integrated into climate adaptation initiatives to enhance their effectiveness and promote greater resilience to climate change impacts.

Key highlights included:

- The importance of working directly with communities and to understand what is important to them, including their needs, to have successful multi-year partnerships with NGOs, academia and government.
- Successful partnerships with communities begin in an atmosphere of trust, not of blame and finger-pointing.
- Promoting youth engagement and intergenerational knowledge transfer is key.

The JPAC Public Forum also included a report from the representatives of the National and Governmental Advisory Committees, who provided key highlights from their most recent letters of advice on ways to empower communities to address climate adaptation challenges. And last but not least, there was an overview of the SEM Process, including the status of the most current submissions on enforcement matters filed with the CEC.

In conclusion, Ms. Trujillo thanked the audience and noted that JPAC would meet in the coming weeks to begin drafting their Advice to the Council on these important topics.

Lisa Helps thanked Ms. Trujillo and then asked former CEC Executive Director Evan Lloyd, who moderated that morning's panel on "Nature-based Solutions, Environmental Justice and Climate Adaptation in Urban Environments," to come to the podium and share key highlights from that session.

Report from morning public segment on *Nature-based Solutions, Environmental Justice and Climate Adaptation in Urban Environments*

Mr. Lloyd began by stating that two years previously the community of Lytton, BC, experienced the highest temperatures ever recorded in Canada. The following day, 30 June, the entire community was destroyed by wildfires, which killed two people and displacing thousands. The points discussed among the panelists related to municipal policy management, nature-based solutions (in support of climate mitigation and adaptation), urban environments, environmental justice and community engagement, as well as opportunities for a cooperative North American agenda. Focusing on the cooperative North American agenda, Mr. Lloyd stated that this represents an opportunity and a need for the federal government to accelerate and enrich the engagement of subnational governments in planning design and the implementation of climate mitigation and adaptation at the level of communities on the ground. In doing so, the principles of environmental justice serve to support communities to survive

and thrive in the face of a hostile environment. More practically, the panel discussions touched on a variety of topics, including the following:

- Urban reforestation national standards for housing and urban sustainable development;
- Full integration and aggregation of municipal-level carbon management targets and accomplishments in national targets;
- Accounting and financing mechanisms that support adaptation and mitigation initiatives at the community level, which recognize that the cost of inaction will be far greater after a disaster;
- Emphasizing the need to lengthen the horizon for community-level planning, by looking much further into the future whilst dealing with the current issues facing communities;
- Considering best approaches for public engagement, particularly amongst racialized, marginalized, displaced, inadequately housed and impoverished communities which are the hardest hit by the climate crisis;
- Education; as was emphasized repeatedly in terms of renewed understanding of peoples' place in nature, and particularly with respect to youth in society in terms of their understanding of the scope and nature of the problem at the local level. This discussion led to the idea of "toxic tours" showing and exposing people to the reality of issues confronting their communities;
- Examining asymmetries in capacity, both at the national level scope and extent of local issues affecting communities across Canada, Mexico and the United States; and
- Strengthening the role of federal leadership in crafting a continental approach to climate adaptation and mitigation in partnership with subnational governments in the three countries.

The Facilitator thanked Mr. Lloyd and recognized the many interesting perspectives and great examples of Indigenous and urban approaches to climate adaptation presented by all the speakers during the morning panel.

Council exchange with experts and the public

Ms. Helps turned to the audience and invited members of the public to share their questions and comments with the Council members as well as with the three invited experts.

She began by asking the Council members to share their thoughts and reflect on what had been said thus far.

Undersecretary Iván Rico took the opportunity to express his gratitude to the public for their participation. He emphasized the importance of considering all opinions, especially those of communities who are directly impacted by the ongoing climate crisis. He noted that the three countries have agreed to listen to and seriously consider the recommendations of their communities. The next crucial step is to implement these recommendations in various environmental policies. He praised the successful environmental community efforts in San Crisanto and emphasized the importance of ongoing government support in facilitating and promoting community initiatives, while honoring their customs and traditions.

Minister Guilbeault agreed with Undersecretary Rico that it is important to listen to communities. However, this is not something that governments usually do well, he acknowledged. As someone who was a climate activist for 25 years before joining government, Minister Guilbeault conveyed that he personally has many ideas about what the government should do, but that to be successful it is important to take a step back and listen to the people with whom we are engaging. Minister Guilbeault indicated he had recently visited the Central Coast of British Columbia to visit Four Nations, with whom the Government of Canada has been working on a large marine protected areas project. His message to them was that the government is there to support the leadership of the Four Nations, not to

take over leadership. This is a challenging task for the federal government but listening to others is an acquired skill but is key to success. For example, he noted that Canada was successful at COP 15 because its representatives listened to what other nations wanted. Minister Guilbeault emphasized the importance of listening when Canada developed its national climate adaptation strategy. The federal government cannot do everything; it needs to work with Indigenous communities, and with partners in municipalities, provinces, and territories in Canada. The government will support these partners, but it will not initiate or do all the work.

Deputy Administer McCabe acknowledged and supported her counterpart's views, stressing the importance of consensus among Leaders. She said that in all her years in government, the projects that have worked the best have been the ones where the community is driving the design of the project. Deputy Administer McCabe also discussed the impact of alignment on decision-making, explaining how consensus influences the process and highlighting potential positive outcomes. To effectively address issues, it is crucial that federal, state, local, and tribal governments work together and utilize their strengths and resources. To ensure success, it is essential to take action at the local level and engage community members. While one-off projects and pilots are great, a focus on scaling up successful initiatives and making them accessible to communities is important, she said. She also highlighted the importance of respecting the needs of local communities and involving them in the decision-making process from the beginning, rather than forcing them to catch up later. This is a significant challenge that we all need to tackle as we move forward.

Questions and responses from the public

Ms. Helps then opened the floor to the questions from the public participating virtually and in person.

The first question received online was: *How can we truly bridge the gap between governmental efforts and Indigenous peoples, who best know the land, so we can work together? How can we facilitate greater participation of Indigenous communities in government decision-making? What steps can be taken to bridge the gap and address any issues that may be hindering this process?*

Mr. Loria responded that a complete collaboration is needed. Governments cannot work independently from the communities. He stated that making public workers more sensitive to the reality on the ground is important when they stand in a powerful position. There is a need to approach the communities directly. He said he was pleased that the San Crisanto community could showcase their efforts during the CEC's 2022 Council Session opening ceremony. He also mentioned that since 2022 San Crisanto is the only community that has been certified for blue carbon. Its mangrove conservation work revealed that 690 hectares serve as a storage area for blue carbon, where they collect 25 tons per hectare per year, equivalent to 17,250 tons per year. This type of carbon is important because it provides the mangrove with environmental services such as water filtration, serving as a refuge for birds and fish, and becoming a protection zone against elements of nature such as strong winds, hurricanes and floods. San Crisanto is collaborating with Semarnat to serve as a model for other communities, he concluded.

Ms. Donatuto added that there is a need to work on policy-making and established regulations at the government level, particularly the local government, to facilitate the collaboration between local, regional and government staff with tribal communities.

During the discussion, Ms. Skw'akw'as brought up two significant gaps that must be addressed. Firstly, as the only youth on the stage, she said she felt the panel lacked representation from her generation. Although all participants have past experiences as young people, the youth hold a unique expertise in terms of growing up in the midst of the climate crisis. It is essential to consider the

perspective of young people and not focus solely on age. Secondly, a considerable perspective is missing from the conversation, which is that of the Arctic Inuit communities. They are experiencing the most severe effects of climate change, and their voices need to be included in these discussions. She continued by saying that to bridge these gaps there is a need to have more sessions that include these perspectives and informal discussions with the communities affected. It is vital to take a decolonized approach and to understand what is needed from their point of view.

The session continued by showcasing the following pre-recorded testimony videos submitted by the public on examples of Indigenous approaches to climate adaptation:

- Antonia Ku Yah of Chacsinkin in Yucatán, Mexico.
- Gina Bare of the National Environmental Health Association on Indigenous resilience in Alaska.
- Water and Sanitation Holistic Technologies Team of the University of British Columbia.

Ms. Helps proceeded to read the next two questions from in-person participants for reflection by the Council members:

JPAC submitted a Letter of Advice to the CEC Council in February 2023 regarding strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from ports and shipping. How do the three countries plan to work together to decarbonize the maritime sector and to protect vulnerable port and coastal communities—largely marginalized communities composed of working-class minorities, and/or Indigenous groups in Canada, Mexico and the United States?

At gatherings like this there is an aspirational projection of our best selves as nations; meanwhile, expanding oil, gas and lithium mining are our realities in our communities. Toxic chemicals aren't properly regulated and the health of our people and the planet suffer. Please tell us about the internal governmental challenges you face as leaders so we can gain insight for future efforts.

Ms. Helps thanked everyone for their active participation and remarked it had been a very enriching discussion. She sincerely thanked all who participated online and in-person in Victoria and thanked the CEC Council members and the invited experts.

“We have learned a lot already today from across North America about the critical role of Indigenous communities and traditional ecological knowledge in addressing climate impacts, and how local governments are putting in place innovative approaches to adapt and protect our urban environments in the face of the climate crisis,” she concluded.

Youth Innovation Challenge Winners

Executive Director Taillant returned to the podium to present the winners of the seventh edition of the CEC’s Youth Innovation Challenge. He explained that since its inception in 2017, the Youth Innovation Challenge has supported youth from across North America and encouraged them to be bold, ambitious and creative, and to continue showing leadership to tackle environmental challenges. This year’s challenge was launched on 21 February 2023 and invited youth to submit entrepreneurial solutions for water solutions for sustainable development.

Before introducing the winners, he asked the 2020 Canadian Youth Innovation Challenge winner to come to the stage and share the story of her successful enterprise. He explained that Monique Chan is a 27-year-old creative from Toronto who founded Bruized in 2019, and hers is a successful story of how everyone can create solutions to tackle environmental challenges.

Monique Chan explained that after working for nine years in the food industry, she saw tons

of perfectly good food going to waste—and little to no action being taken to find solutions. Approximately 58% of all food produced never gets eaten, she said. Each year, around 35.5 million tonnes of food is lost or wasted in Canada due to a lack of infrastructure, limited awareness, and undue stigma against natural aesthetic variations, and nearly 60 million tonnes of CO2 emissions are generated annually by food waste. She described Bruized as a Toronto-based women-owned business on a mission to fight food waste. Bruized, but perfectly good ingredients that are commonly wasted across the supply chain, are instead rescued and upcycled into nutrient-dense sustainable snacks. So far, they have rescued 5,110 lbs of good food from going to waste—and they are just getting started! By offering healthy, sustainable snack options and speaking out about the food waste crisis, Bruized is both educating and empowering Canadians to feel good about what they eat. She said that finding new potential in commonly wasted ingredients drives the passion for innovation in the Bruized kitchen. Bruized’s products are 100% plant-based, gluten-free, and nut-free. They utilize local, organic, and nutrient-dense ingredients to make wholesome products backed by a powerful mission. By creating demand for imperfect food, Bruized is paving the way to a more resilient food system and inspiring the adaptation of a more circular economy. Bruized is also committed to uplifting its community by working with local farmers, small businesses, and non-profits to help support them in reducing their food waste footprint. Localizing suppliers allows for direct conversations with producers to better understand the gaps in their existing models, and where Bruized can fit in to mitigate unnecessary waste with a circular approach. Bruized strives to be more than a business selling a product. She emphasized that connecting with the community gives people 'food for thought' on their role within our food systems. Finally, she noted that from the organic growth of their brand awareness, they could get the interest not only of the CEC by representing Canada at the 2020 Youth Innovation Challenge but have also gained the interest of other national and international events and media. This trajectory led them to speak at events, including COP15 and a Food Loss and Waste webinar hosted by the United Nations FAO and the CEC. Since then, they have received a total of \$50,000 in grant funding with the COIL Activate Circular Accelerator and the Earth’s Own Plant Project, to name a few. Their latest achievement is making it to the final round of the CBC and Desjardins “Dream the Impossible” contest. Out of hundreds of applicants from across Canada, they made it to become a top 10 finalist! With so much interest surrounding their products and vision, their current challenge is meeting the demand! Ms. Chan concluded by saying that when she started Bruized in 2019, she had no idea where it would lead. The fact that she was speaking at the Council Session was proof that, with curiosity, willingness and passion, everyone has the power to create the change they want to see. The takeaway is that ‘perfection’ is a limiting construct that keeps us from appreciating what we have—both with our food and in every other area of our lives, she said in closing.

Mr. Taillant congratulated Monique Chan for all her success and introduced the four 2023 winning teams, which were selected for their impactful and innovative solutions to water-related challenges that demonstrated potential benefits for the environment and direct impacts to support communities, focusing on social, environmental and economic equity:

United States: Hailey Hall, representing the United States, with their solution “Is your water well?”

This solution is a community-based public health awareness campaign focused on well testing and identifying nitrate pollution. *Is your water well?* addresses informational and socioeconomic barriers to well testing and targets rural and underserved communities, where wells are often untested or undertested, leaving citizens in these regions vulnerable to the health hazards of nitrate pollution.

Mexico: Perseida Tenorio Toledo and María Guiebeu Ballesteros Ávila, from Mexico, with their solution “Water for life mobile school (*Escuela itinerante del agua por la vida*)”

This solution creates agents of local change in Indigenous and marginalized communities to provide solutions to different water-related issues, including the lack of access to potable water and contamination of water reserves caused by the absence of drainage systems.

Mexico: Arena Serrano Ramos and Annie Rosas Hernández, representing Mexico, with their solution “Bluebond: Bubbles protecting our water (BlueBond, *burbujas que protegen nuestra agua*)”

This solution offers a new way to fight plastic pollution in water bodies in North America. It is designed to prevent plastic waste in water bodies from reaching the oceans through the implementation of an innovative technology and by empowering communities near rivers and coastlines.

Canada: Gabrielle Kirk and Michael Lavorato, representing Canada, with their solution entitled “Aquaponics”

This solution can mimic the natural ecology in a region by creating a symbiotic relationship between plants and aquatic animals, using a closed-loop system to recirculate water through fish tanks and plant beds, conserving water while producing nutrient-rich food and plant fertilizer.

The presentation of the winning concepts was followed by an informal exchange with the Council members.

Minister Guilbeault thanked and congratulated the Youth Innovation Challenge winners for their innovative ideas. He highlighted the recurring theme of nature-based solutions. He reported that Canada is currently working toward allocating infrastructure funds to support nature, instead of solely investing in roads and bridges, as has been done in the past.

Deputy Administrator McCabe expressed her gratitude and expressed her admiration for the ideas and their implementation through business models.

Undersecretary Iván Rico expressed his gratitude to the winners of the Youth Innovation Challenge and was impressed by the quality of the projects. He said it went against the conventional belief that youth is the future and instead proved that they are the present. The projects presented today showcased nature-based solutions to real problems, he said. He continued by saying that it was remarkable to see that all the projects focused on water and food. He acknowledged that the Mexican government prioritizes life in its environmental policies, including humans, water, animals, and nature. He was pleased to hear that all the projects aimed to protect life. Undersecretary Rico was impressed to see such young people longing for the past, indicating there has been environmental decay in a short time. In his remarks, Undersecretary Rico highlighted various initiatives being implemented in Mexico to enhance preservation of life. One such measure involves the prohibition of glyphosate usage in agriculture, while another focuses on the priority of water use and human consumption prior to industrial use. Overall, Undersecretary Rico emphasized the great significance of ensuring the long-term sustainability of successful projects such as the ones presented today.

Council Announcements

Executive Director Taillant then invited the Council members to make the Council Session announcements.

Minister Guilbeault announced the following new Council initiatives and projects:

Adaptation Champions Initiative

This is a **CS\$500,000** initiative to design and launch a partnership of cities across North America to share knowledge and best practices, and to learn from real projects that build resilience being implemented on the ground. Cities across North America are deploying innovative solutions to support their citizens as they are adapting to a changing climate. But they are also looking for new ideas to meet new challenges. Many cities, like Victoria, are key contributors to local and global climate efforts. They are working in partnership with Indigenous communities, like the Lkwungen People, and those partnerships are vital. This new initiative will create new partnerships between such “Adaptation Champion” cities in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Municipal policymakers, service providers, and Indigenous leaders from each city will be brought together to share best practices through workshops and technical exchanges. And ultimately, a few years from now, the CEC will be able to implement lessons learned in underserved cities and communities, to better meet the needs of urban citizens, including urban Indigenous populations, across the three nations.

Fast Mitigation Strategies to reduce short-lived climate pollutants, including methane.

This **CS\$400,000** project will focus on developing comparable inventories and emissions data collection across our three countries in energy, waste, and agricultural sectors. It will help us identify information gaps in our emissions data and share best practices in addressing those gaps. Moving forward, this will help reach the following commitment that the three countries made this year at the North American Leaders Summit:

- to reduce methane emissions in the waste sector by at least 15% from 2020 levels by 2030,
- and to continue reducing methane and black carbon emissions in North America.

Food Loss and Waste project

With a **CS\$250,000** investment, the new Food Loss and Waste project builds on the great success of the CEC over the past 10 years in addressing this issue. Minister Guilbeault said that tackling food waste has a huge impact on reducing environmental impacts. It also leads to economic gains and a better quality of life for those lacking sufficient food. This project will focus on helping local policymakers and communities in designing and implementing measures to stimulate behavioral changes to reduce food loss and waste. The CEC’s leadership, resources, and guides will help them design impactful actions in their communities.

Reaching Horizon 2030: an Environmental Outlook for North American Cooperation

This **\$500,000** initiative will be launched this fall and will enable the CEC to work with a broad set of partners from international and regional organizations, academia, the business community, civil society, Indigenous peoples, and others. They will work to identify North America's emerging environmental and climate challenges from now until 2030, and beyond. Targeted discussions will cover everything from extraction of minerals to circular economy considerations on chemicals and waste, to climate disaster-related migration, and to climate finance, among other emerging issues that should be central as we are planning our actions over the next few years. The findings brought forward by this new broad network of experts and leading minds will help us set the course for the CEC’s next five-year strategic plan.

Via pre-recorded video, Administrator Regan, Administrator of the United States Environmental Protection Agency, announced the third cycle of the EJ4Climate grant program initiated by the United

States in 2021. This **US\$2 million** new cycle will be launched in fall 2023 and will fund projects that support underserved and vulnerable communities, including Indigenous communities in Canada, Mexico, and the United States. He stated that the countries of North America are united in taking action on both environmental justice and climate change, and this program provides resources directly to community-based organizations to support projects that foster climate resilience and advance environmental justice. During its first two cycles, the CEC selected 29 organizations from over 700 applications, and we are already seeing meaningful results from them, he said. Finally, Administrator Regan announced the theme for the third cycle of EJ4Climate grants: “Community empowerment strategies to improve resilience to extreme weather events in urban settings.”

Undersecretary Rico began by acknowledging the commitment of the three countries to improve environmental conditions at the local and regional levels as demonstrated by prioritizing the participation of Indigenous peoples and communities. Proposing, implementing, and supporting measures designed by and for the community, with a gender focus and the participation of Indigenous communities is an approach that is being increasingly promoted by the CEC.

For this reason, he added, the CEC Council has approved the allocation of **C\$1.75 million** for a new cycle of the North American Partnership for Environmental Community Action (NAPECA), which will be launched in the fall of 2023. Communities across North America will be invited to submit proposals for innovative community projects centered in implementing and exchanging Indigenous traditional knowledge and practices to strengthen resilience and adaptation to climate change in our region. With this type of partnership, the Council recognizes the importance of working with Indigenous communities, since Indigenous Peoples and communities have been the original guardians of territories throughout history and have invaluable knowledge and practices that contribute to the sustainable management and preservation of resources.

Mr. Taillant thanked the Council members for their unwavering support in promoting the region's environmental goals. He acknowledged that this support aligns with the CEC's mandate and reflects its key priorities. Furthermore, he highlighted that this funding will play a significant role in addressing the pressing environmental and climate issues and advancing environmental justice, inclusion, and Indigenous engagement. He is eagerly anticipating the implementation of these objectives in the coming weeks and months.

Mr. Taillant then invited the Council to come to the table and sign the official Council Statement that captures the outcomes and commitments of the meeting.

Council Session Closing

Undersecretary Iván Rico congratulated and thanked Minister Guilbeault and the Government of Canada for successfully leading and organizing this thirtieth session of the CEC Council, a space where the three countries are able to endorse their commitments to the environment and their people and to an organization that establishes a benchmark of real actions and tangible results that can be achieved when working for the common good of the North America region.

He continued by saying that he is pleased that the three countries recognize and work together to strengthen Indigenous communities' predominant and crucial role in caring for the environment, and their ancestral knowledge and worldview of harmonious coexistence with the environment. This represents an urgent appeal to us to rethink our ways of life as predators of the environment, and to welcome all the value that traditional ecological knowledge can contribute to these efforts for conservation, especially in the face of the current global socio-environmental and climate crisis.

Through the exchanges in the various panels and conversations held throughout the session, the role of nature-based solutions was made clear as effective measures to combat the climate and environmental crisis, particularly adding a cross-cutting social component to our work, since it allows us to effectively implement the environmental justice perspective, from large cities to the most remote rural communities, where the effects of climate change are most noticeable.

He expressed his appreciation for the participation of youth and the positive impact of the Youth Innovation Challenge in supporting their innovative solutions to protect our lands and enhance the welfare of the people.

Undersecretary Rico spoke of the continuing need, as a region, to overcome challenges and to work together to promote resilience for communities and ecosystems. This includes implementing policies and actions that integrate traditional knowledge. By collaborating on ideas, concepts, and actions, we can achieve success and leave a positive legacy as a leading organization in promoting the well-being of our societies at both the regional and global levels.

He reiterated Mexico's commitment to the Strategic Plan 2021–2025, and the implementation of guided actions under its pillars, to encourage the participation of all actors in a multisectoral manner at all levels.

He concluded that, through its transformative spirit, the CEC has strengthened the collaboration of the three governments with experts in traditional ecological knowledge, academia, youth and environmental leaders, so that, from a holistic perspective, each sector contributes to a common goal: the well-being of our communities.

As the session drew to a close, Minister Guilbeault expressed his gratitude to all participants for contributing to a productive and fruitful discussion. He also took a moment to thank the Lekwungen People, also known as the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations communities, for their care, stewardship, and leadership of the lands where the session was held. As guests on their land, the Minister recognized the importance of respecting and honoring their presence.

He added that hosting the 30th annual meeting of the CEC Council in Victoria was an honor. He stated that optimism was seen through the collaboration and progress made trilaterally through the work of the CEC.

He said he considers there is no one solution to adapting to the effects of climate change, and effective solutions must focus on the communities for which they are developed. Lessons learned were shared as federal, provincial, and municipal governments develop the right strategies, and the CEC is well positioned to continue to fuel this conversation.

This year's session addressed several topics supporting the development of community-led projects and initiatives. Conversations with the Joint Public Advisory Committee, the Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group, and the CEC Secretariat have led to a constructive discussion of immediate priorities and pressing needs.

He recognized that the progress made by the CEC this year is very encouraging and promising. He confirmed that Canada will continue to push forward on substantive climate action at home and worldwide. He stressed that the trilateral work at the CEC, and in partnership with Indigenous peoples, guarantees full commitment to protecting biodiversity, working toward ending deforestation and conserving 30 per cent of the world's land and waters by 2030.

In closing, he passed the baton, the chairmanship of the CEC Council, over to the United States.

Deputy Administrator McCabe expressed appreciation for the genuinely felt partnership and commitment of the three countries. She said she was delighted to see the participation of various groups, including First Nations, local government, nonprofit organizations, and all those who support the collaboration. She thanked Minister Gilbeault and his delegation, as well as the Secretariat's staff, for their contributions to the event's success and, in addition, commended the Alternate Representatives, the General Standing Committee, the JPAC and TEK Expert Group for their exceptional work to ensure that trilateral collaboration was productive. Finally, she thanked Executive Director Taillant for his leadership of the CEC Secretariat.

Deputy Administrator McCabe expressed pride in the CEC's 30 years of work to achieve such positive results for the North American environment. She extended an invitation to everyone to participate in next year's Council Session in the United States and celebrate the CEC's 30-year anniversary.

The meeting was adjourned.