

## ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CANADA

There are approximately 370 million Indigenous peoples in the world, belonging to 5,000 different groups, in 90 countries. Canada has 634 Indigenous groups (with recognized First Nations governments or bands) plus Inuit and Metis people. First Nations peoples had settled and established trade routes across Canada by 1,000 BC to 500 BC. Aboriginal people in Canada interacted with Europeans as far back as 1,000 AD, but prolonged contact came only after Europeans established permanent settlements in the 17th and 18th centuries. It led to colonization of Indigenous territories across present day Canada, and stratification by Crown of Canada hit hard the sovereignty of First Nations. As a result of colonization process, the First Nations faced severe human rights violations and environmental destructions. According to Amnesty International, despite living in one of the world's wealthiest countries, Indigenous families and communities in Canada continue to face widespread impoverishment, inadequate housing, food insecurity, ill-health and unsafe drinking water. Countless extractive industries, oil and gas projects, pipelines, hydel projects, urban centres and waste dumps have not only irreversibly damaged sensitive ecological zones, but the inhabitant Indigenous people are also exposed to serious environmental hazards and risks. Common environmental issues include the contamination of drinking water, groundwater, soil and foods with heavy metals such as mercury, cadmium, lead, nickel, iron, etc. The population of various First Nations of Canada is declining as a consequence of poisoning of ecosystems by extractive industries and other related threats. On the contrary, many Indigenous peoples believe the natural world is sacred, consider themselves as one element of the natural world, and that it needs to be whole for future generations. Of late, Canada has started recognizing the issues of Indigenous people. In 2010, Canada ratified the United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous People and reiterated specially its Articles 23 and 29. *"Indigenous peoples have known for thousands of years how to care for our planet. The rest of us have a lot to learn and no time to waste"*, emphasized the Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during 2015 UNFCCC forum. Hopefully, the rest of the Canadian people will help save the Aboriginal peoples of Canada and their cultures, languages, traditions, resources and knowledge.

### ***About the Speaker:***

**Dr. Hasrat Arjumend** is the *Director* at The Grassroots Institute (Canada/India), *Mitacs Elevate Fellow* at Université de Montréal Faculté de Droit, and associated with, in honorary capacity, the Centre for International Sustainable Development Law (CISDL), McGill University Faculty of Law, Montreal (Canada) as *Senior Fellow*, and Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University of Ukraine, Kharkiv as *Visiting Fellow*. He is also associated as part-time *Senior Agroecology Specialist* with Earth Alive Clean Technologies Inc., Québec (Canada). He possesses 26 years experience in research, training, teaching, field action and organizational management, dealing within multidisciplinary areas of Environment, Natural Resources, Governance, and Indigenous Rights. His current areas of academic & action interests include: *Indigenous & Community Conserved Areas and Policies; Governance of Natural Resources; Nagoya Protocol and National ABS Laws; Resource Rights of Indigenous People; Traditional Knowledge and Indigenous Foods; Governance of Grazing Commons; Rangeland Ecosystems and Pastoral Livelihoods; Water & Wetlands Conservation Policies*. He can be contacted at: [harjumend@gmail.com](mailto:harjumend@gmail.com), [hasrat.arjumend@umontreal.ca](mailto:hasrat.arjumend@umontreal.ca)