The Alaska Institute for Justice Addresses the Climate Change Crisis

AIJ's important work on climate-forced relocation continues as our planet, and especially the Arctic, deteriorates at an ever-quickening pace. And although there is frustration, there is also hope.

The Alaska Institute for Justice (AIJ) is a non-profit organization that works to protect the human rights of all Alaskans, including immigrants, refugees, crime victims including survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, and Alaska Native communities by providing critical services to those underserved populations through legal representation, language access, training and educational programs and advocating for access, housing, training, and educational programs for in-state and out-of-state residents. AIJ's mission is to promote justice for all Alaskans, including immigrants, refugees, crime victims including survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, and Alaska Native communities by providing critical services to those underserved populations through legal representation, language access, training and educational programs and advocating for access, housing, training, and educational programs for in-state and out-of-state residents.

AIJ's policy work has identified a number of factors that must be taken into account in order to decolonize the relocation process. Relocation needs to be a decision made by the community, not for the community, the move needs to be planned and not a consequence of an extreme weather event. Human rights, including the right to self-determination, must be of utmost concern, as well as making sure residents maintain their cultural, social and kinship connections.

There is no question that AIJ has had some remarkable impact, especially in the 15 communities who are active partners with AIJ. Cochran says, "AIJ has done a real service in providing an opportunity to come together to share information." But there's much work to be done, both to aid communities in peril now, and those who will face a similar dilemma in the future.

AIJ has written to HUD and FEMA in response to the agencies' request for feedback about equity issues and tribal hazard mitigation planning. AIJ has advocated that climate-forced relocation be considered as a natural disaster and proposed amending the Stafford Act to include "ongoing environmental change, such as sea level rise and erosion, that is predicted to damage or destroy critical community infrastructure and threaten the lives of community residents within three years," in determining who qualifies for federal aid. AIJ has also partnered with other agencies in filing a complaint with the United Nations in 2020 on behalf of four tribes in Louisiana and one in Alaska.

The United States government's failure to protect the Tribal Nations named herein has resulted in the loss of sacred ancestral homelands, destruction to sacred burial sites, the endangerment of cultural traditions, heritage, health, life and livelihoods," the complaint's executive summary reads.

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For more information on the Alaska Institute for Justice's programs or how you can help support their efforts, visit akijp.org.