

MAY / JUNE 2019

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL   
**BOOK CLUB**  
DISCUSSION  
GUIDE

Sheila Watt-Cloutier

## The Right to Be Cold

One Woman's Fight to  
Protect the Arctic and  
Save the Planet from  
Climate Change

Foreword by  
Bill McKibben



# THE RIGHT TO BE COLD

BY SHEILA WATT-CLOUTIER

RECOMMENDED BY SARAH COX

# WELCOME

## Amnesty Book Club members

Welcome back to the Amnesty International Book Club! As we have just celebrated the Earth Day globally on April 22nd, we are thrilled to announce that our new book will touch on issues of global threat of climate change. *The Right to Be Cold* by Sheila Watt-Cloutier explores the parallels between safeguarding the Arctic and the survival of Inuit culture—and ultimately the world—in the face of past, present, and future environmental degradation. *The Right to Be Cold* is a human story of resilience, commitment, and survival told from the unique vantage point of an Inuk woman whose traditional upbringing in the Arctic community of Kuujuaq, Quebec would shape her later life as one of the most influential and acclaimed environmental, cultural, and human rights advocates in the world.

This book by Sheila Watt-Cloutier has been recommended by our guest reader of the month Sarah Cox, with whom you will read beyond the book to learn more about some of the most important and timely concerns of human rights and climate change.

In this guide, you will find Cox's reflection on the book, as well as discussion questions, an Amnesty Background section, and an action you can take to call on Canadian government to do all they can to help prevent climate change.

Sheila Watt-Cloutier passionately argues that climate change is a human rights issue and one to which all of us on the planet are inextricably linked. *The Right to Be Cold* is the culmination of Watt-Cloutier's regional, national, and international work over the last twenty-five years, weaving historical traumas and current issues such as climate change, leadership, and sustainability in the Arctic into her personal story to give a coherent and holistic voice to an important subject.

Thank you very much for being part of the Amnesty International Book Club. We appreciate your interest and would love to hear from you with any questions, suggestions or comments you may have. Just send us an email at [bookclub@amnesty.ca](mailto:bookclub@amnesty.ca).

We think you will find this book to be a useful and inspiring book to read and learn from. Besides its concept of climate change and the survival of Inuit culture, the book will touch on important themes such as human rights activism and the importance of mobilization for a positive change. We are pleased to be able to be part of this conversation.

### About Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than seven million supporters, members and activists in over 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for all people to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion, and are funded mainly by our membership.

Until everyone can enjoy all of their rights, we will continue our efforts. We will not stop until everyone can live in dignity; until every person's voice can be heard; until no one is tortured or executed.

Our members are the cornerstone of these efforts. They take up human rights issues through letter-writing, online and off line campaigning, demonstrations, vigils and direct lobbying of those with power and influence.

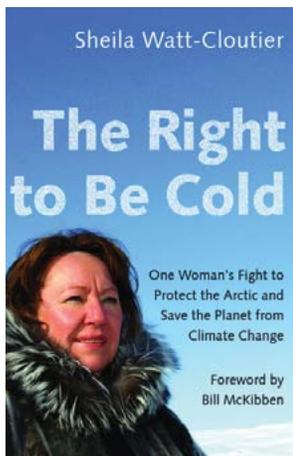
Locally, nationally and globally, we join together to mobilize public pressure and show international solidarity.

Together, we make a difference.

For more information about Amnesty International visit [www.amnesty.ca](http://www.amnesty.ca) or write to us at: Amnesty International, 312 Laurier Ave. E., Ottawa, ON K1N 1H9.



### About this month's author, **Sheila Watt-Cloutier**



Sheila Watt-Cloutier is an environmental, cultural and human rights advocate. Nobel Peace Prize nominee, Sheila Watt-Cloutier is in the business of transforming public opinion into public policy. Watt-Cloutier offers a new model for 21st century leadership. She speaks with passion and urgency on the issues of today — the environment, the economy,

foreign policy, global health, and sustainability — not as separate concerns, but as a deeply interconnected whole. At a time when people are seeking solutions, direction, and a sense of hope, this global leader provides a big picture of where we are and where we're headed.

In 2007, Watt-Cloutier was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for her advocacy work in showing the impact of global climate change on human rights — especially in the Arctic, where it is felt more immediately, and more dramatically, than anywhere else in the world. Watt-Cloutier is an Officer of the Order of Canada; the recipient of the Aboriginal Achievement

Award; the UN Champion of the Earth Award; the Norwegian Sophie Prize; and the Right Livelihood Award, which she won in November, 2015 and is widely considered the “Nobel Alternative”.

From 1995-2002, Watt-Cloutier was elected the Canadian President of the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC). She was later elected in 2002 to become the International Chair of the ICC, representing the 155,000 Inuit from Canada, Greenland, Alaska, and Russia — she held this post until 2006.

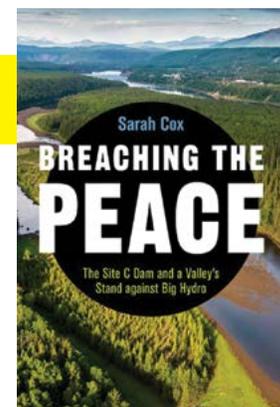
Widely recognized for her influential work, Watt-Cloutier gave a TEDx Talk in 2016 titled “Human Trauma and Climate Trauma as One”. She is also the author of the current book we are reading, *The Right to Be Cold: One Woman's Story of Protecting Her Culture, the Arctic and the Whole Planet*, which was nominated for the 2016 BC National Award for Canadian Non-Fiction and the Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing. In 2017, the book was shortlisted for CBC Canada Reads, defended by Chantal Kreviazuk. The book is selected by Amnesty International Book Club for May/June 2019. Watt-Cloutier was also shortlisted for the Kobo Emerging Writer Prize.

### About this month's reader, **Sarah Cox**



Sarah is an author and award-winning journalist based in Victoria, B.C. Her first book — *Breaching the Peace: The Site C Dam and a Valley's Stand Against Big Hydro* — was published in 2018, with an introduction by Alex Neve, Secretary General of Amnesty Canada. The book tells the story of the First Nations and non-indigenous farm families who are trying to stop construction of a large hydro dam on B.C.'s Peace River that will flood some of Canada's best farmland and destroy the heart of Treaty 8 traditional territory. At the

time this discussion guide was published, *Breaching the Peace* was a finalist for the national Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing and a finalist for a B.C. book prize (the Roderick Haig-Brown Regional Prize). It was also a finalist for the George Ryga Award for Social Awareness. Sarah currently writes about energy and environmental issues for the on-line publication *The Narwhal*.



## Sarah Cox's Reflection on *The Right to Be Cold*

Like many Canadians, I have never been to the Arctic. Browsing through a friend's bookcase last year, I spotted *The Right to Be Cold*. Once I read the first few sentences of Sheila Watt-Cloutier's astonishing memoir and call-to-action, I couldn't put it down. The book turned much of what I thought I knew about the Arctic upside down, giving me a different, much richer, perspective and painting a vivid picture of how much not just the Arctic but people everywhere stand to lose if efforts fail to stop further climate change.

"For the first ten years of my life, I travelled only by dog team." Thus begins the memoir by Watt-Cloutier, one of the world's most recognized environmental and human rights advocates. The youngest of four children, Watt-Cloutier was born in the northern part of Quebec (now Nunavik) in 1953. Like generations of Inuit, she "bonded with the ice and snow." Her family lived off the land, hunting and fishing as part of a close-knit culture with a tradition of food-sharing and the skills to thrive in a wondrous place that many outsiders saw as dark and cold.

Then everything changed in a single generation. Government policies destroyed or transformed communities beyond recognition. Ancient traditions were supplanted by southern habits. Inuit traditional wisdom was cast aside for southern programs and institutions, writes Watt-Cloutier, who was sent away to school when she was 10. But most shocking of all among the myriad changes, the Arctic ice and snow on which Inuit life had depended for thousands of years began to vanish at alarming speed.

*The Right to Be Cold* explores the far-reaching consequences of climate change for the Arctic and Inuit culture. It focuses on how everything is interconnected. Children who can no longer hunt with their families miss valuable opportunities to learn character and life skills such as courage, patience and how to develop sound judgement and wisdom, or to learn about the place where they live and the role that animals play in Inuit lives. Food insecurity causes health problems. Dislocation and the loss of culture leads to spikes in suicide, violence and abuse.

Climate change is happening faster in the Arctic than anywhere else, and Watt-Cloutier explains in stark detail

why the region is a canary in the coal mine for the rest of our planet. "If we cannot save the frozen Arctic, how can we hope to save the rest of the world?" she asks.

In a concerted and continuing attempt to save their home and culture, Watt-Cloutier and other Inuit draw on their experience dealing with Persistent Organic Pollutants, also known as POPs, which have poisoned the Arctic food chain. Watt-Cloutier's deep dive into POPs begins when she attends the 1995 Inuit Circumpolar Council general assembly. (The council is a non-governmental organization that represents the Inuit populations of Canada, Alaska, Greenland and Chukotka, Russia, with a mandate to protect and promote the Inuit culture and way of life.) There, she hears in detail about toxins in Inuit country food — for example, in seal and whale meat — and the sobering implications for the environment and for people's health and culture. She becomes the head of the Canadian branch of the council — a moment Watt-Cloutier describes as "the point at which my life's work found me" — and embarks on both a personal and political journey in the fight against POPs.

Later, after she becomes chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, Watt-Cloutier takes that personal and political journey to another level when she plays an instrumental role in helping to reframe the climate change debate as a human rights issue. Under Watt-Cloutier's leadership, backed by legal advisors and Inuit elders, the ICC submits a landmark petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The petition argues that the U.S. is violating Inuit human rights by failing to prevent climate change.

The petition makes the case that environmental protection is intrinsically linked to the protection of human rights. "The power of the right-based approach was that it moved the discussion out of the realm of dry economic and technical debate..." writes Watt-Cloutier.

So too does *The Right to Be Cold* catapult the discussion about climate change into a new realm, presenting readers with an intimate glimpse of Inuit culture and the fundamental human rights that stand to be eroded or lost with global warming — not just in the Arctic but everywhere.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FROM GUEST READER SARAH COX

1. Watt-Cloutier writes that “ice is life.” What does she mean by that?
2. When Watt-Cloutier was 10, she was selected to go to school in the south with her friend Lizzie. She describes how one experience she had while she was away was responsible for a “fear of retribution or censorship whenever I attempted to express myself honestly.” What was the experience? How did it affect Watt-Cloutier and how did she strive to overcome her fear?
3. Watt-Cloutier returns to her community at the age of 18 to find noisy snowmobiles instead of dog teams. Preoccupied at the time with teenage priorities, she doesn’t question what has happened to the dogs and only finds out years later. She writes that, “So horrific was this story, and the wounds caused by it so deep, that no one spoke about it for years. But as I would discover, it was just one of many tragedies to befall my community.” What happened to the dogs and why? How did it affect the community?
4. Watt-Cloutier and other Inuit People were given a number by the federal government. She calls the number — hers was E8-352 — a “dog tag.” What was the purpose of the number and what did it symbolize?
5. Mark Gordon — a childhood friend and second cousin of Watt-Cloutier who was part of the negotiating team for the James Bay agreement — compared the land claims settlement to a story about a snowy owl that had just eaten a lemming. What was the story and how does it relate to the agreement? What does the story say about the relationship between the Inuit and Cree and the federal and provincial governments?
6. In the summer of 1995, Watt-Cloutier attended the Inuit Circumpolar Council general assembly, where she heard in detail about Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) poisoning the Arctic food chain. What do POPs mean for the Inuit in terms of their health and the environment? Why do POPs affect the Arctic disproportionately and how does that

impact the Inuit hunting and food-sharing culture? What were some of the barriers to eliminating the use of POPs and how do those barriers relate to the struggle to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and slow climate change?



7. What are some of the implications of a warming climate for the Arctic and the Inuit? Why is the Arctic like the canary in the coal mine for global warming?
8. What prevents us, as a country and a global community, from making significant reductions to greenhouse gas emissions and preventing further climate change?
9. Where did the expression “the right to be cold” come from and what does it symbolize? Is it the same thing as the right to be protected from climate change?
10. Watt-Cloutier played a fundamental role in a petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which asked that protection from climate change be recognized as a fundamental human right. The petition was titled, “Seeking Relief from Violations Resulting from Global Warming Caused by Acts and Omissions of the United States.” What was the outcome of that petition and how did it help form the basis for the continuing discussion about the power of a human rights approach in addressing climate change?

# CLIMATE CHANGE AND HUMAN RIGHTS



Kumi Naidoo, Amnesty International's Secretary General, joining student climate strike in March 15 2019 London. Thousands of students from schools, colleges, and universities across the country walked out in to join the second major strike against climate change this year.

**“A climate catastrophe is already unfolding. We have only 144 months to stop a climate catastrophe by preventing temperatures from rising above the 1.5 Degree mark. Everyday, governments, companies, insurers, and banks make decisions that worsen the problem. The longer the world waits, the harder it becomes to solve the problem. Let’s accelerate our engagement”**

Climate change is a reality for our warming world. And scientists overwhelmingly agree: climate change is caused by people.

Climate change is and will continue to harm all of us unless governments take action. Its effects are likely to be much more pronounced for certain groups – for example, those communities dependent on agricultural or coastal livelihoods – as well as those who are generally already vulnerable, disadvantaged and subject to discrimination.

*“You say you love your children above all else, and yet you are stealing their future in front of their very eyes.”*

– Greta Thunberg, Climate activist and Founder of Climate School Strike

One of the biggest drivers of climate change by far is our burning of fossil fuels – coal, gas and oil – which has increased the concentration of greenhouse gases – such as carbon dioxide – in our atmosphere. This, coupled with other activities like clearing land for agriculture, is causing the average temperature of our planet to increase. In fact, scientists are as certain of the link between greenhouse gases and global warming as they are of the link between smoking and lung cancer.

This is not a recent conclusion. The scientific community has collected and studied the data on this for decades. Warnings about global warming started making headlines back in the late 1980s.

In Canada, recent examples such as the 2017 and 2018 wildfires in British Columbia and extreme heat waves in eastern Canada are painful evidence of the human rights impacts of climate change at the current global warming level of ‘just’ 1°C above pre-industrial levels.

Rising water temperatures have already affected wild fish sources that Indigenous peoples rely on for food, culture and livelihoods across Canada; and food security and species survival are at further risk from increasing global warming. Diminishing sea ice has affected Indigenous peoples' access to and use of the coastal environment.

## Who is responsible for stopping climate change?

### National Governments

National Governments have the obligation to mitigate the harmful effects of climate change by taking the most ambitious measures possible to prevent or reduce greenhouse emissions within the shortest possible time-frame. While wealthy states need to lead the way, both internally and through international cooperation, all countries must take all reasonable steps to reduce emissions to the full extent of their abilities.

Governments must also take all necessary steps to help everyone within their jurisdiction to adapt to the foreseeable and unavoidable effects of climate change.

Governments must take steps to tackle climate change as fast and as humanely as possible. In their efforts to address climate change, they must not resort to measures that directly or indirectly violate human rights. For example, conservation areas or renewable energy projects must not be created on the lands of Indigenous peoples without their explicit consent.

Unfortunately, despite the rhetoric, pledges made by Canada to mitigate climate change are completely inadequate. Young people in Quebec, like others in France and the Netherlands, have filed a class action lawsuit against the Canadian government for its failure to establish sufficient climate mitigation targets and measures.

Without significant and sustained action, it is difficult to see how Canada will avoid contributing to catastrophic climate change.

- Canada produces the highest per person greenhouse gas emissions in the G20 and has the G20's highest energy use per capita
- Canada continues to support the expansion of fossil fuels production, especially the Alberta oil sands and related infrastructure (such as pipelines).

- According to the International Institute for Sustainable Development, Canada provides hundreds of millions of dollars in fossil fuel subsidies.
- Mandatory carbon pricing is a step in the right direction but it faces sustained and well-funded corporate resistance and legal challenge from some provinces. It must not disproportionately affect low-income households.

### Corporations

Fossil fuel companies<sup>1</sup> have been historically among the most responsible for climate change – and this continues today. Research shows<sup>2</sup> that just 100 fossil fuel-producing companies are responsible for 71% of global greenhouse gas emissions since 1988.

There is growing evidence<sup>3</sup> that major fossil fuel companies have known for decades about the harmful effects of burning fossil fuels and have attempted to suppress that information and block efforts to tackle climate change.

Companies must assess the potential effects of their activities on human rights and put in place measures to prevent negative impacts.



- 1 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/landmark-human-rights-and-climate-change-investigation-could-help-millions-worldwide/>
- 2 <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/jul/10/100-fossil-fuel-companies-investors-responsible-71-global-emissions-cdp-study-climate-change>
- 3 <https://www.ciel.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Smoke-Fumes.pdf>

**ACT NOW!**

**RESISTANCE  
IS A  
HUMAN  
RIGHT**

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**Please send a short, polite letter supporting these calls for justice to:**

**Prime Minister Justin Trudeau**

Prime Minister's Office  
80 Wellington St Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

**Minister for the Environment and Climate Change,  
Catherine McKenna**

107 Catherine Street  
Ottawa, Ontario, K2P 0P4

**In the face of this urgent threat to human rights and, in fact, to humanity, it is imperative that Canada adopt the most ambitious measures possible to reduce greenhouse gas emissions within the shortest possible timeframe, both nationally and through international cooperation and assistance.**

Please call on Canada to:

- Align federal, provincial and territorial governments emissions reduction targets for 2030 with the imperative to limit the increase of global average temperature to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.
- Commit and work to end the use of all fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas) and to shift to 100% renewable energy by 2040, including ending fossil fuel subsidies.

- Ensure that approval of natural resource and other major development projects meet Canada's climate change targets, other environmental and international human rights obligations and that cumulative impacts of such project approvals don't push Canada past the point of no return.
- Ensure federal, provincial and territorial governments identify and pursue alternative energy sources that are less destructive to the climate and which can be pursued with the free, prior and informed consent, and active participation, of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.
- Ensure that all measures to mitigate climate change are consistent with Canada's human rights obligations, including the obligation to uphold the rights of Indigenous peoples, and that just transition to a zero-carbon economy does not put at further risk those already facing marginalization and discrimination in Canada.

For more information [bhr@amnesty.ca](mailto:bhr@amnesty.ca)



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL - CANADA  
**CORPORATE ACTION NETWORK**



## COMING UP IN JULY/AUGUST 2019

### *Prisoner of Tehran* by Marina Nemat

Recommended by guest reader, Martha Batiz

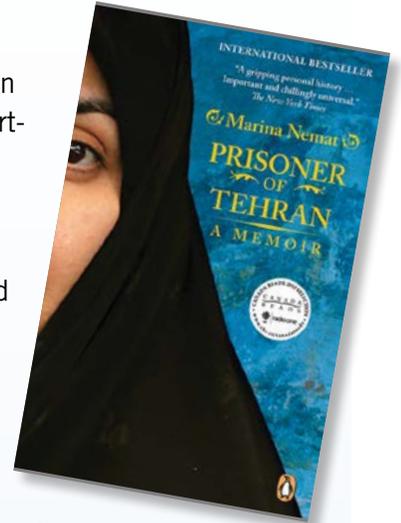
In her heartbreaking, triumphant, and elegantly written memoir, *Prisoner of Tehran*, Marina Nemat tells the heart-pounding story of her life as a young girl in Iran during the early days of Ayatollah Khomeini's brutal Islamic Revolution.

In January 1982, Marina Nemat, then just sixteen years old, was arrested, tortured, and sentenced to death for political crimes. Until then, her life in Tehran had centered around school, summer parties at the lake, and her crush on Andre, the young man she had met at church. But when math and history were subordinated to the study of the Koran and political propaganda, Marina protested. Her teacher replied, "If you don't like it, leave." She did, and, to her surprise, other students followed.

Soon she was arrested with hundreds of other youths who had dared to speak out, and they were taken to the notorious Evin prison in Tehran. Two guards interrogated her. One beat her into unconsciousness; the other, Ali, fell in love with her.

Sentenced to death for refusing to give up the names of her friends, she was minutes from being executed when Ali, using his family connections to Ayatollah Khomeini, plucked her from the firing squad and had her sentence reduced to life in prison. But he exacted a shocking price for saving her life -- with a dizzying combination of terror and tenderness, he asked her to marry him and abandon her Christian faith for Islam. If she didn't, he would see to it that her family was harmed. She spent the next two years as a prisoner of the state, and of the man who held her life, and her family's lives, in his hands.

Lyrical, passionate, and suffused throughout with grace and sensitivity, Marina Nemat's memoir is like no other. Her search for emotional redemption envelops her jailers, her husband and his family, and the country of her birth -- each of whom she grants the greatest gift of all: forgiveness.



**The discussion guide will be sent out July 2019.**

In the meantime, if you have any questions or comments, please contact us at [bookclub@amnesty.ca](mailto:bookclub@amnesty.ca).

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