

Indigenous Collective Rights, Lands, Territories, and Resources

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Before there was day, before there was night, the world was one; the world was spirit.

Today the world has become two. There is the material side, made up of things, objects, and bodies, and there is the spiritual side made up of selves, souls, persons, and the dense webs of communicative connections that sustain them.

In our conquest of the planet we are chipping away at the spirit life that nourishes the cosmos. This is why the global ecological crisis facing us today is at base a spiritual crisis. It is a threat to the spirit life that sustains our very being, for we cannot live in a world of mere things.

Seen from the point of view of spirit the mega-diverse tropical rainforests of the Ecuadorian Amazon where we, the Sapara Nation has always lived, are absolutely unique; they house the greatest concentration of spirit life on our planet. The rainforest is one vast ecology of persons; it is teeming with a multitude of souls. From the smallest ant to the tallest tree the forest is a great interrelating network of communicating selves.

With oil and mineral exploitation, logging, and road construction, the spirit life of the forest is under threat. The spirits are suffering. They tell us this; we *feel* it.

The contribution that we, the indigenous peoples of the Amazon offer to humanity is the recognition of nature as "spirit." We know how to connect to this spiritual life and we are committed to sustaining the places where it can flourish.

In recognition of this, our recommendations for nation states are the following:

- 1) As indigenous peoples we need to have the collective right to connect to the spirit world by means of a continuing relation to our forests. The state should recognize this right and must take the appropriate measures to defend against all kinds of extractive activities on our lands.
- 2) But our recommendations go beyond this. To overcome this planetary environmental crisis requires a new worldwide way of comprehending nature as spiritual.
- 3) As many national constitutions are beginning to affirm, nature has rights. This is because at base it is made up of spiritual beings –people like you and me. Recognizing this spiritual essence makes us rethink rights in a different way.
- 4) Cultivating ways to connect ourselves anew with this spirit world, through dreams and through our every day engagements with forests and other natural spaces, can help us overcome the environmental crisis, offering a new way of thinking about development and the good life.