

Ti qacachajij ri ojer qab'anikil pa ruwi'ri tzuqun'ik kichin ri qajotay
3rd International Indigenous Peoples Corn Conference, March 7 - 9, 2017

"Protecting our ancestral origins in order to guarantee the Food Sovereignty of our future generations."

The Declaration of Tecpán

March 9th, 2017

As Indigenous Corn Peoples representing Nations, Tribes, Communities and organizations from North, Central, South America, and the Caribbean, we gathered in Tecpán, Guatemala, Iximche, the ancestral capital of the Mayan Kaqchikel. We express our sincere appreciation to the Mayan Kaqchikel Peoples for welcoming us to their beautiful homeland and sharing with us their warm hospitality, solidarity and traditional foods. We also thank the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), Centro de Proyectos de Desarrollo Integral Indígena (CEPRODI) and the Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala (CONAVIGUA) for hosting this important gathering.

We begin by expressing thanks to the heart of the sky, heart of the earth, heart of the wind and heart of the water. We recognize the forces and sources of life such as the four directions, four winds, waters, fire, air, land, trees, birds, animals, and all the traditional seeds that provide us with health and traditional knowledge. We thank and remember our grandmothers, grandfathers and ancestors who left us our traditions, languages, worldviews and cultures. We have listened to them. We make a sacred commitment to them to protect and continue these practices and teach them to the new generations to ensure their continuity.

Corn in its sacred colors and flavors is the historical memory of our Peoples. It is a great gift. Our creation stories show us how we are connected to the sacred corn. In each color there is an intention, an inspiration, a breath and a wisdom. It is our connection to the past, to the future, to our own identity and to our Mother Earth. The number of kernels and rows, and the time it takes from planting to harvest are sacred numbers that connect us to the energy of the earth and sky.

The life cycles of corn are like our own. We have ceremonies to give thanks for each stage of the corn: when we plant, when the first leaves begin to grow, when the ears ripe, and when the ears are harvested and brought into the house. Each stage of the corn's life holds important instructions of how to live with integrity. Through planting, harvesting and preparing the corn we maintain our collective way of life, sharing with our neighbors and communities and with the small animals that live in the earth, to ensure the prosperity of the future generations and all living things.

We reaffirm the work that has been done to protect and restore Food Sovereignty by Indigenous Peoples, which is the basis for our work going forward. We reaffirm the Declaration of Atitlán, the Declarations from the 1st and 2nd International Indigenous Peoples Corn Conferences and the other Declarations from Indigenous Peoples to protect their corn and other traditional foods.

We understand that life in modern day society makes it more difficult for us to hear the sacred teachings of the corn. We don't have time to plant or harvest. Our children are in school and sometimes our youth leave their communities once they are educated. New religions have come into our communities that are taking our people away from the traditional ceremonial way of life. We are forgetting many things that made our Peoples strong. Eating transgenic corn and other colonized foods is enslaving us and making us weak and sick. We must take care of the collective memories of our peoples and transmit them to the next generations. We saw our own power in the successful mobilization of the Mayan peoples against the law promoted by Monsanto in 2013 in Guatemala, and the successful efforts in Tlaxcala, México to achieve the adoption of state laws to prevent the genetic modification of original seeds. We will continue to unite, build our networks and mobilize to oppose the

intentions of corporations and governments to patent, control, privatize and modify our traditional seeds.

On March 8th, during our gathering, we commemorated International Women's Day by affirming the essential and indispensable role of women as leaders, life givers, wisdom keepers and food producers. We gave thanks for all the women in our lives from the baby girl that will be born tonight to the oldest woman elder, to our mothers, grandmothers, great grandmothers, aunts, nieces, daughters, granddaughters, sisters and friends, and especially to the sacred mother of us all, Mother Earth. We recognize with respect our traditional healers and midwives and call for an end to discriminatory policies which fail to recognize their essential knowledge and contributions to the health of our communities. We also express outrage over the deaths of 35 girls on International Women's Day in a government-run children's home fire in San Jose Pinula near Guatemala City, and the overcrowding, abuse and neglect which had been reported at that facility. We call upon the Guatemalan government to conduct a thorough investigation into the causes, bring those responsible to justice and provide healthy and safe conditions for children in need so that such a horrific incident will never reoccur.

We are facing urgent and critical threats from mining, including uranium and gold mining, other extractive industries, contamination and depletion of our waters, denial of land and water rights, use of toxic agro-chemicals, and introduction of genetically modified seeds, fish, plants and animals. We support the creation and implementation of Indigenous Peoples Food Sovereignty Zones free from pesticides, mining and genetically modified seeds as a way of strengthening our ability to resist these threats.

We urgently call upon the world community to halt its dependence on fossil fuel- based energy which is putting Indigenous Peoples and the living world as a whole at grave risk. While we support the work of Indigenous Peoples engaged in United Nations processes addressing climate change, the new Platform for Protection and Exchange of Traditional Knowledge must be developed in a manner which respects our knowledge and upholds our rights, including Free, Prior and Informed Consent, full and effective participation and Self-Determination. We must also be assured that our knowledge will not be commercialized, and that new development models based on sustainable energy are implemented as the basis for sharing or exchanging our traditional seeds, practices and knowledge to help the world survive the impacts of climate change. We request to be informed of these developments so that we can decide if and how we will participate as knowledge and rights holders.

We insist that States include Indigenous Peoples in decision-making that affects our lives and rights including our food sovereignty. We will continue to reject attempts by governments and corporations to control and commercialize our seeds, disrespect and disregard our traditional legal and cultural systems, and violate our rights to our traditional lands, territories, waters and resources. We stand in solidarity with the Lakota, Dakota and Nakota Nations at Standing Rock and all other Indigenous Peoples who are opposing oil and gas Pipelines, fracking, mining, tar sands extraction and other destructive forms of development that poison land and water, destroy sacred places and further undermine Food Sovereignty. We reject all national and sub-national legal frameworks that seek to legitimize the displacement of Indigenous Peoples from their traditional lands and support the appropriation and commercialization of the sacred elements of life.

We have experienced the negative impacts of "Green Revolution" policies and Free Trade Agreements imposed on our Peoples without our consent. We know that we don't need to use pesticides or chemical fertilizers that contaminate our families, our food and the earth. They are destroying the diversity, spirit and strength of corn, and our natural way of life. We need the diversity of corn in all its colors and varieties to be able to adapt to stay healthy and to survive the impacts of climate change which we see increasing in our communities. We do not want to eat the transgenic corn and foods that are being brought into our communities that are breaking the

connection with the corn, with mother earth and with ourselves day by day. We are concerned about the “mega-fusions” of corporations that patent and modify seeds, produce toxic pesticides and seek to control the global food market. This includes plans by Monsanto and Bayer Crop Science to merge and form one huge instrument of destruction for the Food Sovereignty, health and survival of Indigenous Peoples around the world.

We call upon States to implement their commitments to uphold, recognize and implement the rights recognized as the minimum standards in the UN and the OAS American Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as their obligations under ILO 169, the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples Outcome Document, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, the UN Human Rights Covenants and the Nation-to-Nation Treaties they have concluded with Indigenous Peoples.

We reject the discriminatory attempt by the government of Guatemala to deny the recognition of Mayan juridical systems, which existed for thousands of year prior to colonization, through the proposed Constitutional Reform. These systems are recognized in Article 34 of the UN Declaration as well as in Articles 22 and 23 of the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which Guatemala has committed to uphold.

We stand in solidarity with all Indigenous Peoples who are opposing such attempts to violate their rights to cultural heritage and subsistence as affirmed in Articles 20 and 31 of the UN Declaration and Articles 28 and 29 of the American Declaration. We support the struggles presented at this Conference by Indigenous Peoples from Guatemala, México, Ecuador, Panamá, United States, Canada and Perú to protect their Food and Seed Sovereignty. This includes their rights to hunting, farming, gathering, herding and fishing, to have unrestricted access to traditional lands, forests, waters and sacred places and to protect and control their original seeds. Examples include the opposition of the Indigenous Peoples of Ecuador to the proposed new National Seed Law and the assertion by the First Nations of Treaties 1 - 11 in Canada of their Treaty Right to Food, including the right to control fishing and hunting in their Treaty-recognized territories as affirmed in Article 37 of the UN Declaration and Article 24 of the American Declaration.

We reject the United States President’s Executive Order and Memorandums issued on January 23rd 2017 to expedite fossil fuel development in violation of Treaties and Free, Prior and Informed Consent of the impacted Indigenous Peoples. We also reject similar laws adopted in February 2017 by the government of Perú relaxing environmental and human rights requirements for development projects such as mining and deforestation.

We support the struggles of other small-scale community-based food producers including campesinos, hunters, fishers, gatherers and pastoralists who are facing many of these same threats and policies, and support the current process of drafting a United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Campesinos.

Finally, we call for States and the United Nations to protect Indigenous, human and environmental rights defenders and halt the militarization, criminalization, imprisonment, threats and assassinations carried out against Indigenous Peoples exercising their right to protest oppressive laws, resist forced relocation, and defend their lands, waters, health, sacred places, food sovereignty, Treaties and other inherent rights against imposed development. We call for freedom for those leaders and defenders who have been incarcerated for defending their rights as Indigenous Peoples.

We hereby commit to the following actions and strategies from the community to the international levels:

1. To protect, conserve and use our traditional seeds and methods and actively oppose activities by

- corporations or government policies that undermine this commitment;
2. To continue to carry out our traditional ceremonies for protection of sacred corn and our Mother Earth;
 3. To assert our rights to our traditional, lands, waters and resources including their demarcation, return and recognition, as well as our traditional legal systems utilizing national, regional and international processes;
 4. To work with our communities to educate them about Food Sovereignty and the importance of protecting, restoring and using our traditional seeds, foods and planting methods that are healthy and chemical-free;
 5. To declare our respective territories as Food Sovereignty Zones to provide us with a tool to oppose and reverse the negative impacts of pesticides, genetically modified seeds, deforestation, urbanization, mining and other forms of imposed development;
 6. To collect testimonies from community members to document human rights violations caused by the impacts of pesticides, mining (including sexual violence) and other activities that destroy our health for presentation to United Nations Human Rights bodies in order to ensure that our voices are heard and impunity will not continue;
 7. To develop comprehensive strategies for active participation and engagement in a range of United Nations bodies addressing Food Security and Food Sovereignty, Bio-Diversity, Intellectual Property, Cultural Heritage and Climate Change;
 8. To insist that the new Platform for Traditional Knowledge Exchange under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is developed with the full and equal participation of Indigenous Peoples from all regions and especially our knowledge holders and traditional food producers and in a manner that fully respects our rights, traditional indigenous sciences and the richness of our ancestral knowledge;
 9. To call for an immediate and total halt to the international trade in banned and highly restricted pesticides, especially the export of pesticides that have been banned for use in the producing country, and to challenge UN Chemical Conventions, in particular the Rotterdam Convention that permit this practice;
 10. To continue to organize Food Sovereignty gatherings on the community, Nation and International levels to support and inform each other, build the participation of our youth, and develop coordinated strategies and solutions in response to the threats we face;
 11. To engage in inter-generational dialogue and support our younger generations to value, learn and practice these ways by learning from elders, traditional practitioners and knowledge holders in our communities;
 12. Finally, and most important, we commit to continue planting our corn. Putting seeds in the ground is the most essential of all strategies for the protection of the corn. The other strategies on all the levels we have described will serve to support this simple and profound life-giving act.

We affirm with one voice that our inherent rights and dignity are not negotiable. Our traditional lands, waters, cultures, languages and ways of life are sacred. Our corn, seeds and other traditional foods are also sacred. They are the basis of our lives and total identity, and our work to defend them will continue and will not subside.

If we can feed ourselves we will survive, now and into the future. If we can feed ourselves we can defend our lands and our Peoples. If we can feed ourselves we will have Food Sovereignty.

Adopted by Consensus on March 9, 2017, Tecpán Guatemala

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