



THE CONVENING OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES FOR THE HEALING OF MOTHER EARTH

Dear Friends,

It is a great honor to share the “*Message of the Living Spirit of the Convening of Indigenous Peoples for the Healing of Mother Earth,*” the outcome of the Convening that took place in the Cultural Territory of the Maya in Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico on March 10-13, 2008. At the direction of the participants at this gathering, this message is a Call To Action to Indigenous peoples, and to all peoples of the world.

The *Convening for the Protection of Mother Earth* was planned by and for Indigenous peoples from North America to bring together Indigenous leaders, including spiritual and traditional healers, elders, wisdom keepers, and practitioners, to address the need for immediate intervention and action, based upon our original teachings, in order to ensure a healthy future for coming generations. We recognize that our current and future actions must not be based upon the same worldview that has brought such global destruction to Mother Earth. We must reclaim and revitalize the wisdom passed on to us from our Ancestors about how to be responsible to each other and to the Natural World.

This Message was created through ceremony and prayer, but it is up to each of us to find ways to give this Message life and meaning as we all take steps to protect the Natural World. It is intended to be a living document that serves as a source of inspiration to Indigenous peoples, governments, and civil society, to take our responsibilities to protect Mother Earth seriously, and to provide some guidance for moving forward.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge the participation and deliberations of the Indigenous peoples, representing Indigenous nations and communities from throughout North America, and gratefully thank the following organizations for their generous contributions and support including: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Health Canada, The Mexican Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources, The Mexican National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples, and the Commission for Environmental Cooperation.

Please visit the *Convening for the Protection of Mother Earth* website for further information at: www.indigenousconvening.com.

Message of the Living Spirit of the *Convening of Indigenous Peoples for the Healing of Mother Earth at the Cultural Territory of the Maya*

March 10-13, 2008
Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico

INTRODUCTION

Having been welcomed to convene in ceremony at the sacred site of Palenque (*Cerco de Estacas*) to heed the call of Mother Earth and honor the sacred elements of water, air, earth and fire in unity as Indigenous Peoples of Lak N'á Lum upon the traditional territory of the Maya People on the 10 -13 of March 2008, we commit in unity to the Message of the Living Spirit.

We the Indigenous Nations, Peoples, tribes, pueblos, communities, villages, situated within the geopolitical boundaries claimed by the nation-states of Mexico, Canada, and the United States hereby make this declaration and urgent message to the world on the basis of our spirituality and the natural biological Laws of Life on Mother Earth, the Sacred Life-Giver. It is our inherent birthright and responsibility as the original free and independent Peoples of Turtle Island to care for Mother Earth in keeping with our Original Instructions from Creation.

These natural laws are inclusive of Honor, Respect, Love, Compassion, Peace, and Friendship. It is in keeping with these natural laws and Indigenous values that the traditional knowledge and wisdom bequeathed to us by our ancestors, and carried today by our Elders, teaches us how to live in balance with the Four Sacred Elements of Life: Earth, Water, Air, and Fire. We are the guardians of these elements of Life.

Fire is meant to ignite and unite the spirit of humanity. Water is the life blood of all living things. Air is the sacred breath of life. Earth is the Mother that nurtures us all. Beyond the tangible aspect of our relationships with all the sacred elements, there is intangible interaction. The role of the sacred elements is central in our customs, traditions, stories, songs, and dances.

The Indigenous prophecies foretell the urgent environmental crisis we face today. The Indigenous Peoples have the responsibility to provide our traditional knowledge to the world. The ancestral ways of Indigenous peoples have the power to heal our Mother Earth. We demand that the nation-state and state governments stop the destruction and violations against the four elements of Life.

Western legal and religious histories, philosophies and laws have totally disrupted our ways of life. Our traditional spiritual ways and knowledge systems honor the interconnections and interrelationships of the Web of Life, and sustain, not destroy Mother Earth.

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VISION

As caretakers of Mother Earth, speaking with one spirit, one mind, one heart and as one family, utilizing the original teachings given to human beings by the Creator, we will restore balance and harmony to Mother Earth and all her children.

Guided by the wisdom and vision of our ancestors in the spirit world, elders, spiritual leaders and traditional and Indigenous community leaders, we understand the Natural Law given to us by the Creator guides our traditional way of life in harmony with all creation upon the land and waters of Mother Earth.

THE PAIN OF MOTHER EARTH

As the peoples of the land, we are the first to hear, see, feel, taste and spiritually sense the pain of Mother Earth. She is dying and we hear her cry. Her heart is wounded and her pain is our pain, her illness is our illness, our survival is dependent upon her survival.

As Indigenous peoples, we have a spiritual and familial relationship to the sacred elements of water, air, earth and fire, and understand their holistic and inseparable relationship with each other. Through the western claim of asserting ownership over these sacred elements their spiritual interdependence is being destroyed.

Water

*Minan ja 'Minan kuxtal.
Without water, there is no life.*

The water represents the life-blood and the sustenance of all life. The purity and natural flow of water is necessary for maintaining the interdependent balance between all forms of life. Our sacred birthright includes the rivers, streams, natural springs, hot waters, lakes, underground aquifers, seas, bays, inlets, oceans, ice, snow, rain and all forms of and bodies of water.

Deforestation and the removal of flora and fauna have resulted in the destruction of water sources. Organic and inorganic waste, refuse, and industrial wastewater are dumped directly into rivers and water sources that people need for drinking. As a result of toxins and pollutants, and industrial wastes many sources of water are unfit to drink and lead to serious and deadly health problems for humans and other forms of life. Indigenous peoples are often in the situation of

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having to choose between thirst and the possibility of serious illness or death from drinking polluted and contaminated water.

Dams and hydroelectric projects pose a massive problem for the integrity of ecosystems and the ability of Indigenous Peoples to maintain their traditional ways of life, hunting, fishing, trapping, and harvesting. As a result of diversion and depletion of pristine water sources, many Indigenous Peoples do not have access to water. Regulatory frameworks also infringe upon Indigenous peoples' rights to, use of, and access to water. The privatization and commodification of water is a critical issue. No one owns water.

Air

The air is the Messenger that announces the rains, it is a voice of our ancestors, and it is the central element for the preservation of cultures. The main causes of air pollution are industrialization, militarization, electricity generation, energy generation from nonrenewable sources, means of transport and inadequate management of toxic wastes. This situation threatens the health of our ecosystems, putting life at risk. Air pollution caused by automobile exhaust, has great impacts on the respiratory health of all peoples, particularly in urban areas. The pollution carried by the wind from coal-fire plants emit toxins negatively impact peoples at great distances. The burning of oil, gas, and coal ("fossil fuels") causing the global warming is the primary source of human-induced climate change.

Earth

Our sacred lands are under siege. The Western world improperly asserts that they have a right to extract the natural resources from our lands and territories without regard for our rights. This extraction has left in its wake a legacy of contamination, waste and loss of life. Indigenous peoples are facing the negative impacts of pollution, mining, deforestation, logging, oil prospecting, dumping of toxic waste, genetic engineering, fertilizers and pesticides, and soil erosion, all of which contribute to a severe loss of biodiversity. All of these threaten food security, subsistence lifestyles, human health and our ability to sustain our peoples. Our peoples are suffering from high rates of cancers, diabetes, heart disease and other serious diseases previously unknown to our peoples. In the name of conservation of biodiversity, Indigenous Peoples have been displaced from our territories designated as protected areas. There is a direct correlation between the health of the land and the holistic health and well-being of the people. This has particular and significant impact on Indigenous Women - the rape and desecration of Mother Earth is reflected in what has happened to Indigenous Women.

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Fire

The fire that sparks life is being disrespected by technology of the industrialized world that allows it to take life such as the fire in the coal-fired powered plants, the toxic waste incinerators, the fossil-fuel combustion engine and other polluting technologies that add to greenhouse gases, a primary cause of climate change. The abuse of the sacred element of fire conflicts with Indigenous knowledge and practices. Human beings are using fire in an exploitive, manipulative, destructive and deadly manner. The culturally inappropriate use of fire is manifested in the atomic bomb, military weaponry and warfare, nuclear power and radioactive waste, the extractive energy industries of coal, oil and gas, and the burning of forests and grasslands that result in the extinction of flora and fauna within our ancestral territories.

THE HEALING OF MOTHER EARTH

Based on our inherent sovereignty and consistent with our inherent birthright to self-determination in international law, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, we affirm our responsibility to protect water, air, earth and fire. Because of our relationship with our lands, waters and natural surroundings since time immemorial, we carry the knowledge, ideas and solutions that the world needs today. We know how to live with Mother Earth because we are her children. We commit to sharing certain teachings of our peoples to all humanity so that they can find their original, sacred relationship to Mother Earth, Father Sky, and all Creation. It is our responsibility given to us by the Creator to speak for the plants, for the animals, and all life to bring their message to all of peoples and nations of the world.

Traditional knowledge can aid in providing accurate ecological baselines embedded in and carried in Indigenous languages, including in traditional names of places, stories and oral narratives that reveal the original roles of natural habitats as given to us by the Creator. These baselines are critical for societal adaptation to environmental change, land use change and climate change, as well as indigenous cultural survival in the face of these detrimental changes in the world we live in today.

Call to Action to Indigenous Peoples

Based on our inherent sovereignty and consistent with our right of self-determination in international law, we affirm our inherent birthright to water, air, earth and fire. We call upon our Indigenous brothers and sisters to fulfill our responsibilities bequeathed by our ancestors to secure a healthy environment for present and future generations. We know how to live with Mother Earth because we are her children. We are a powerful spiritual people. It is this spiritual

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connection to Mother Earth, Father Sky, and all Creation that the rest of the World must respect. Our extended family includes our Mother Earth, Father Sky, and our brothers and sisters, the animal and plant life, therefore, it is the responsibility given to us by the Creator to speak for the plants, for the animals, for the rest of Creation, for the future of all the children, for the future of Mother Earth and Father Sky. We commit to continue our traditional practices for the environment based on standards consistent with the Natural Laws of the Creator for the benefit of future generations.

We call upon all Indigenous Peoples to:

Honor and defend all the sacred elements by conducting their traditional ceremonies and prayers revitalizing and perpetuating traditional values and knowledge systems and applying them to today's realities. We the Indigenous Peoples at this Convening, offer to share the following gifts of knowledge through our own skills that have been developed and through proven best practices/successful indigenous practices or knowledge that have been successful:

- Develop recycling capabilities for plastic, paper, glass and metals in our own communities, ending the use of plastic;
 - Exercise traditional ways of growing crops; and
 - Plant more trees to clean the air and water, a holistic reforestation with endemic plants.
- Educate Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people beginning with our children and including individuals, communities, governments, institutions and the media about the role of these sacred elements in our world and our livelihoods.
 - Create and develop an Indigenous education circle without borders, based on traditional knowledge using appropriate tools of science to protect our sacred elements. This network can include traditional practices, research experience, development of curriculum for our children, and a library of knowledge that can be shared with all of our Peoples.
 - Collaborate and organize events, gatherings and conferences for the protection of the sacred elements.
 - Acknowledge the ancestral time in uniting “All Nations, All Faiths, One Prayer” on June 21st to pray for united healing.

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- Assert and exercise our inherent, prior and collective rights to manage, maintain and protect our lands and territories.
- Express our full support for the existing Indigenous organizations and associations which are currently advocating for the protection, stewardship and sustainability of water as a resource and as a part of Indigenous identity, spirituality, culture and nationhood.
- There are numerous documents, resources, tools, instruments, treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements that have been created by or in partnership with Indigenous Peoples. We encourage more Indigenous Peoples to create such tools in accordance with their respective customs, protocols and laws, to articulate, implement or enforce our inherent rights and in exercising self determination. We also urge Indigenous Peoples to share such tools, skills, knowledge and resources with each other.
- Exercise the right of free, prior and informed consent to any actions that may affect their lands and territories.

Call to Action to the Global Community

Acknowledging the dignity of all life, peoples and nations, we call upon the global community to unite with Indigenous Peoples to learn the teachings and wisdom as bestowed to us by the Creator in order to heal Mother Earth. The realization of this Call to Action will only occur with the full, active and collaborative partnership of all peoples and nations. We call upon Leaders of all Nations of the World at all levels of decision making, to accept responsibility for the welfare of future generations. Living by the traditional principles and values of Honor, Respect, Love, Compassion, Peace and Friendship, we call upon the Global Community:

International

- Fully implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- Protect Indigenous peoples from the negative impacts of trade agreements.
- Recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other international law, in the implementation of international treaties, conventions and agreements relevant to the environment, trade, and human rights including:
 - Convention on Biological Diversity, including Articles 8(j) and 10.
 - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol

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- International Labour Organization Convention (ILO) 107 and 169
- Organization of American States
- OAS Proposed Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples
- General Assembly resolution 1803 (XVII) of 14 December 1962, “Permanent sovereignty over natural resources”
- Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief

National

- Commit to the full implementation at the domestic level of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- That all levels of nation-state and state governments live up to their commitments to Indigenous Peoples by recognizing our inherent rights, cultural rights and rights held pursuant to treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements.
- Implement a system of legislation, regulation, fines or taxation for excessive use or abuse of any of the four sacred elements.
- Enter into a collaborative, and active partnership with Indigenous Peoples to protect, sustain and maintain sacred sites of Indigenous Peoples.
- Governments should guarantee the restructuring and repair of the damage done to the cultural patrimony and territory of Indigenous Peoples.

Non-Governmental and Civil Society

- Civil society and non-governmental organizations to involve and support Indigenous Peoples in the protection of our lands, territories and rights. This includes advocacy concerning any activity impacting the four sacred elements.

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- Encourage civil society, and non-governmental organizations to respect and honor the roles and responsibilities of Indigenous Peoples in carrying out their mandates and roles;

Private Sector and State Corporations

- Indigenous laws governing the four sacred elements must be respected by the private sector, in addition to relevant international, and national laws that are consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in carrying out their business or projects.
- Ensure the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples prior to commencing any undertaking which impacts the four sacred elements, including assessments or exploration, and involving the participation of governments if necessary.

DECLARATION

We, the Convening of Indigenous Peoples for the Healing of Mother Earth, support the spirit and intent of this message and send it out to all Indigenous peoples and to the World as a living document.

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