

# The Declaration of Tlaxcala

March 8, 2019

We, Corn Peoples from the Indigenous lands now known as North, Central, South America and the Caribbean have gathered at this sacred time of year, the time of renewal for all life, at the 4th International Indigenous Peoples Corn Conference, *“By our ancestral rights, we protect and guarantee our Food Sovereignty and that of our future generations”* from March 7<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019 held in Vicente Guerrero, Tlaxcala, México.

We begin by giving thanks for the Purapecha opening ceremony in which we offered prayers and thanksgiving for life’s renewal and regeneration and asked for spiritual help to sustain the corn as the basis of our lives as Indigenous Peoples in Mexico and many other places. We express our heartfelt appreciation to our hosts the *Proyecto de Desarrollo Rural Integral Vicente Guerrero* for their generous hospitality. We also thank the sponsors, the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) and *Asemblea de los Pueblos Indigenas por la Soberania Alimentaria en Mexico* (APISA), along with the co-sponsors Cultural Survival, Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance (NAFSA), *Alianza Milpa* and the Indigenous Peoples Alliance on Food Sovereignty, Traditional Knowledge and Climate Change, for bringing us together.

For this Conference we built upon the firm foundation set down for us by the 1st, 2nd and 3rd International Corn Conferences held in Oaxaca Mexico, Okemah Oklahoma and Tecpan Guatemala. We endorse the Declarations from those gatherings as the basis for our work.

We affirm that Corn has its own ancestral knowledge that has enabled it to adapt to many climates and eco-systems. This knowledge is key to our ability to adapt to and survive climate change as long as we remember how to listen and talk to the corn as our ancestors did. Corn speaks to us about the spirit, generosity and richness of the land. The Corn reminds us that the winds, the colors and energies of the four directions, the abundant gifts of our Mother Earth, the air and fire, the balance and integration of the male and female energies, the rains, the heat and cold of the natural climate cycles, the sun and its life-giving warmth and light, the moon and its affinity with the female nations, the oceans and fresh waters, the stars that guide us, all the large and small life forms that live on and in the earth, and our ceremonies, cultures and spiritual practices are all essential parts of our traditional food systems. Just as these elements sustain us, we have a sacred responsibility to protect, respect and defend them. This is our understanding of agro-ecology.

Corn does not grow alone. It grows together with the beans, squash, and other traditional plants which are also our relatives. It depends on the living things in the soil, the rainfall, snow melt, sun and air and the honey bees and other pollenating insects. These work together, nourish and balance each other, just as we, diverse Indigenous Peoples, nourish and balance each other with our knowledge and wisdom. The corn unites us and teaches us to work together, and we are grateful, corn has

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brought us together at this gathering to share our struggles and strengthen our resilience.

For Indigenous Peoples, corn is not a business. Corn, in all of its beautiful varieties and colors, has given us life and we are the beneficiaries of its wondrous diversity. It is our roots, the basis and source of our traditional knowledge, ways of knowing and ceremonies. Corn is our elder and ancestor. We use it to pray and stay connected to all life. We thank corn for the tortillas, *atole* (porridge), *posole* (hominy), blue corn mush, tamales and other traditional corn foods that our ancestors used, continue to sustain us on a daily basis, and will be the source of survival for our future generations.

We recognize the vital role of our traditional knowledge holders, spiritual and cultural leaders, traditional healers and midwives and other practitioners who have continued to protect and preserve our ways of knowing and healing, sometimes in the face of repression and criminalization. We also give thanks for our elders who have the living memory of planting and growing without chemicals and modified seeds. We will ask them in a respectful way to share this wisdom and practical knowledge so that these practices can be strengthened and restored in our communities.

At this gathering, we shared the threats we are facing in our homelands that put at risk the survival of corn's original vitality and diversity, and which also threaten our own survival as Peoples and Nations. As long as we depend on modern and fast food instead of restoring and using our traditional foods, seeds and growing methods, we will not be independent. We will continue to be controlled by those that seek to keep us colonized. As long as we use toxic pesticides and allow them to be used in our traditional territories, we will continue to see our biodiversity destroyed and our children born sick. If we allow extractive forms of development to contaminate our water and land, our crops will not thrive, and we will go hungry. If we allow our sacred traditional seeds to be genetically modified and put on the market, they will lose their ancestral memory and not be there for us when we need them the most including to help us adapt to and survive the impacts of Climate Change.

We must continue to renew our sacred obligations, relationships and responsibilities to protect our original seeds, waters, the natural balance of the climate and the vitality of the natural world in all its manifestations. Working together we can help each other to rebuild our communities, protect our seeds and restore our lifeways. We celebrate the work of the Indigenous producers and communities who shared examples of growing methods and practices during this Conference using traditional knowledge and practices to restore the *milpa* as our traditional method of food production and to renew, and to repair and rejuvenate soils that have been depleted and contaminated by industrial agriculture, mining, pesticides and other forms of environmental contamination.

Today, on International Women's Day, we honor, in particular, the essential role of Indigenous

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women as holders and caretakers of the traditional knowledge and practices that are essential for the protection of our food sovereignty and the transmission of our lifeways to new generations.

We recognize that we must also impact the discussions taking place at the United Nations that address and impact our food systems, traditional knowledge, cultural heritage, seeds, ecosystems, health, and other aspects of our lives. Traditional knowledge holders, farmers and other Indigenous food producers can make vital contributions to impact global policies and decisions that affect us on themes such as climate change, food and seed sovereignty, sustainable development, cultural heritage and bio-diversity based on the richness of our living cultures, Indigenous sciences and knowledge systems. Indigenous food producers and knowledge holders we must have the opportunity to have a voice in these processes, and to be informed about opportunities for input into global discussions that directly affect our rights and lives.

We express our solidarity with the political and legal struggles undertaken by Indigenous Peoples that have been won and that are ongoing in defense of rights to traditional land, territories and resources that are the foundation of food sovereignty. We also call for strong action by the international community in defense of Indigenous Peoples facing political repression, violence and criminalization for opposing dispossession, relocation, environmental degradation and land-grabbing. Using our traditional knowledge and resources without our consent, agreement or participation is another form of extraction from Indigenous communities. Our knowledge is collective and intergenerational and cannot be patented or owned by other entities. We call for respect of this principle by the academic and scientific community, corporations, States and international bodies. We affirm that our seeds, plants and animals are sacred and must not be subject to genetic modification or patenting by corporations under any circumstances.

We are warriors in defense of our traditional lifeways. Our ancestral memories, histories and values must be kept alive. We therefore make the following commitments and calls to action:

- 1) To revitalize and protect our traditional lifeways, to keep our Indigenous ways of knowing, our songs, stories, languages, histories and sciences strong and alive and to pass them down to the coming generations.
- 2) To return to our original ways of planting, growing and harvesting. We will continue to create spaces like this, to share our successes, methods, seeds and solutions. We support the planning of a 5<sup>th</sup> International Corn Peoples Conference to be hosted by the Dine' Nation Shiprock Chapter, in New Mexico (USA) in 2021.
- 3) To be Earth Defenders so that the corn, and we, will survive, and to defend our inherent rights to our lands, waters and other resources, cultural and ancestral heritage including seeds, ancestral

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cultural knowledge and practices.

- 4) To insist that States uphold their responsibilities to respect the rights affirmed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the OAS American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, ILO Convention 169, the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, Nation to Nation Treaties with Indigenous Peoples and other international standards that recognize and respect our rights.
- 5) To reject the policies of “free trade” that undermine our traditional local economies and perpetuate poverty and forced migration.
- 6) To oppose State and international laws and policies that undermine our inherent rights and food sovereignty and policies, and, as Indigenous Peoples, Nations and governments to implement our own policies and laws and protect our seeds and traditional knowledge
- 7) To confront environmental racism and environmental violence including the international trafficking of banned pesticides, the appropriation of our lands, waters and growing areas by multi-national corporations, development projects, industrial agriculture, mono-cultivation, bio/agro fuel production, introduction of invasive species and extractive industries such as mining, fracking, drilling and pipelines.
- 8) To steadfastly oppose the patenting and other forms of appropriation of our traditional seeds and knowledge without our Free Prior and Informed Consent.
- 9) To oppose using corn for bio-fuel production which violates the spirit of the corn, promotes genetic modification and displaces Indigenous Peoples and their traditional food producing areas.
- 10) To include youth and children from the youngest ages in traditional food growing and production, to ensure the transference of knowledge, and to create pathways to leadership and inclusion of youth in all areas of work to defend food sovereignty. To ensure that they continue to have opportunities to learn their Peoples’ histories and stories, speak their languages, and be educated in both their own and mainstream educational systems if they so choose. We also commit to find places for them to work in their communities to bring their knowledge and skills home.
- 11) To resist the corporate control, dispossession, genetic modification and monopolization of seeds and plant medicines which are the gifts passed down from the hands our ancestors, and to support each other in the repatriation/rematriation of our seeds and medicines that have been collected and banked by corporations, collectors, universities, museums, institutions and non-Indigenous organizations, including by taking action on the international level.
- 12) To continue to call for the protection of Indigenous traditional plant medicines whose existence is threatened by development, pesticides and climate change.
- 13) To demand protection for Indigenous human rights, environmental and food sovereignty defenders who are criminalized for standing up against the appropriation of their lands and the imposition of mega-projects that are displacing their Peoples from their sacred places and food production areas.
- 14) To restore cultural protocols within and among our Peoples and communities, and to continue to

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strengthen our alliances, networks and trade relationships, using traditional methods and new communications technologies, in order to share and trade seeds, methods and information and provide mutual support in time of crisis,

- 15) To continue to call for a halt to the production, import and export, storage and use of toxic pesticides and other hazardous materials affecting lands, waters, food, reproductive health and pollinating insects, without our Free Prior and Informed Consent in accordance with Article 29 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- 16) To continue to call for the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to amend the code of conduct on Pesticides to ensure the FPIC of Indigenous Peoples who would be affected, and for the UN chemicals Conventions, in particular the Rotterdam Convention that allows the international transport of banned pesticides, to be brought into accordance with international human rights standards.
- 17) To stand united with the Indigenous Peoples who are working to defend our rights to our traditional knowledge and the sacred life spirit of all living beings called “genetic resources” at the current discussions at the World Intellectual Property Organization and its Intergovernmental Committee. To clearly state that as traditional food producers and rights advocates, we will not accept any legally-binding outcome of this process that does not fully recognize and uphold the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples affirmed as the minimum standard by the UN Declaration on the Rights of indigenous Peoples, including rights to cultural heritage and FPIC.
- 18) To seek opportunities to engage actively in the new Traditional Knowledge Exchange Platform for mitigating Climate Change at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, as long as our rights to traditional knowledge, cultural heritage and Indigenous food production practices are respected, protected and safeguarded. We ask that the Indigenous members of the new Facilitative Working Group keep us informed about opportunities for our voices to be heard in this matter that affects us so directly, and we call upon the State Parties to implement new methods of development in order to uphold the commitment they made in the Paris Agreement and ensure that the rise in global temperature be kept to no more than 1.5 degrees centigrade.

Our prophecies warn that climate change is coming. We all understand this. Whether we will fulfill our responsibilities to ensure that our children and future generations survive these changes is up to us.

We affirm that planting our corn in all its original varieties is a sacred act and is essential for our survival. We will continue to work with each other to build a united front, to learn, share, advocate, educate, defend our rights and ways of life, and resist the powerful forces that seek to undermine them. We will continue stand together as warriors on the side of life.

But most importantly, we will plant our corn and to continue our own ways of living, being and knowing. In that way, we, our children and future generations will survive as who we are.

***Adopted by consensus in Vicente Guerrero, Tlaxcala Mexico on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019***