

ICCA Consortium Statement for SBSTTA-24 and SBI-03 Special virtual session on “Biodiversity, One Health and COVID-19”

The COVID-19 Pandemic is an acute health crisis with significant implications for Indigenous peoples and local communities and their Territories of Life. However, it has also exposed and exacerbated deeper systemic issues with inequality, injustice and environmental harm. Earlier this year, the ICCA Consortium hosted a series of online exchanges to strengthen solidarity between Indigenous peoples and local communities and support our Members to share their experiences with and responses to COVID in territories of life around the world. Indigenous peoples and local communities spoke about the many challenges and difficulties that they are currently facing and also shared inspiring stories of traditional practices of self-isolation, food sovereignty systems, innovative use of technology for monitoring, strong systems of self-governance and networking at the regional level to support custodian communities.

Even in this context of the pandemic, the exemplary role of collective lands and territories of life in protecting, restoring and sustainably using biodiversity for planetary and human health and wellbeing has once again been highlighted. Thus, it is imperative that the post-2020 framework clearly recognizes and respects Indigenous peoples’ and communities’ rights, responsibilities and self-determined priorities, and supports their leadership in visioning and decision-making processes that affect them and their territories, which encompass a significant proportion of the world’s lands and nature.

As state governments focus overwhelming on economic recovery, they are rolling back environmental and human rights protections, including by newly authorising or expanding destructive industries like mining, agribusiness and infrastructure in territories of life and by introducing measures that restrict civic space and place environmental defenders at even greater risk than before. This is completely counter to the current Strategic Plan and the necessity of transformative change in the post-2020 framework. We must take a clear and irrevocable stance against this ‘business as usual’ approach. We must halt drivers of biodiversity loss to prevent and reduce the risk of future pandemics and instead support Indigenous peoples and communities to conserve and restore their collective lands and territories. We must ensure that economic recovery measures actually incorporate the drastic changes needed for our planet, respect human rights and do not compromise Territories of Life and their custodian communities.

This is an opportunity to promote lasting, meaningful and inclusive transformative change. Territories of life and their custodians are an essential part of this transformation. Long-term systematic and structural changes are needed for the future of diversity, equality and justice.