



## The North American Regional Declaration on Biocultural Diversity

### *The Atateken Declaration<sup>1</sup>*

May 2019

### ***Declaration and Recommended Actions***

**More than one hundred participants, Indigenous Peoples of North America, together with partners and supporters, united by their passion and concern for nature and culture, came together at the first North American Dialogue on Biocultural Diversity to advance an alliance to promote the diversity of life on earth, in all its beauty and diversity.**

**Biocultural Diversity – the diversity of life in all its interdependent manifestations: biological, cultural, linguistic, and spiritual – is a fundamental component of environmental conservation, sustainable development, and decision-making at local, regional, and global scales.**

*We, the participants of the first North American Dialogue on Biocultural Diversity,*

*With deep gratitude* to the Kanien'keha:ka Nation, who welcomed us to this gathering place, which is the traditional territory of Indigenous peoples who have cared for this land since time immemorial;

*Recognizing and building on* the lessons learned from the Joint Programme of Work between the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on the Links between Biological and Cultural Diversity (2010-2020), and the programmes of work on traditional knowledge, including the Plan of Action on Customary Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity<sup>2</sup> and the programme of work on protected areas under the Convention on Biological Diversity;

*Acknowledging* that biological and cultural diversity are interconnected, mutually reinforcing, interdependent, and often co-evolved;

*Recognizing* that indigenous peoples embody biocultural diversity, with different genders fulfilling crucial roles in conserving nature and culture;

<sup>1</sup> "Atateken" in Kanien'kéha, the Mohawk language, meaning 'brothers and sisters' and as such implies fraternity and peace.

<sup>2</sup> Decision XIII/12 B, annex.

*Recognizing* the critical role of indigenous youth in safeguarding the future of biocultural diversity;

*Acknowledging* that indigenous languages epitomize the inextricable links between cultural and biological diversity, and the importance of supporting this connection during the United Nations International Year of Indigenous Languages<sup>3</sup> in 2019 and beyond;

*Recognizing* the historical injustices and destruction that indigenous peoples have suffered regarding their ancestral lands, waters, traditional management practices and related cultural heritage;

*Acknowledging* the ten (10) principles established through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Canada);<sup>4</sup>

*Emphasizing* the significance of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as the minimum international standard to respect and recognize the rights of indigenous peoples;

*Recognizing* that the diverse worldviews or cosmologies encapsulated in the rituals and spiritual practices specific to each indigenous Nation across North America are a fundamental part of the life of indigenous peoples;

*Recognizing* that indigenous peoples' territories, traditional lands and waters, and sacred sites and areas embody the holistic connection to Mother Earth including the four elements - water, air, earth and fire- and are important for:

- a) Sustaining indigenous peoples' cultures, spiritualities, languages, identities, and ancestral heritage and memory in order to promote and transmit the teachings to the current and future generations;
- b) Protecting biological diversity (plants, animals, their habitats, ecosystems and genetic diversity).

*Emphasizing* that international commitments related to biodiversity, climate change, sustainable development and world heritage can only be achieved with the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and recognition of their rights and responsibilities to ancestral lands and waters, customary sustainable use and their related knowledge, innovation and practices;

*Recognizing* indigenous peoples' rights to self-determination, to self-governance and to provide or withhold free, prior and informed consent to any proposed activities, including in the name of development and conservation, that may affect ancestral lands and waters;

*Recognizing* the critical role that indigenous peoples play in global biodiversity conservation, including in national and international systems of protected and conserved areas, through the establishment and governance of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, tribal parks, and other indigenous peoples' conserved territories and areas (ICCAs).

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<sup>3</sup> Resolution 71/178.

<sup>4</sup> Reconciliation, Self-Determination, Healing Relationships, Decolonization, Equity and Inclusivity, Mutual Respect, Ethical Space, Reconnection, Trust Building, Education and Outreach.

## **Threats and Challenges to Indigenous Peoples and Biocultural Diversity**

*Affirming that*, in order to move forward, we have to acknowledge the historical context and ongoing legacy of colonialism;

*Considering* multiple injustice and continuing threats to indigenous peoples and their ancestral lands and waters including from climate and socio-ecological changes, extractive industries such as mining, forestry, hydroelectric development, oil and gas, and their associated infrastructure (such as roads and the use of helicopters), urbanization, technology, appropriation of lands, exclusion from protected areas, lack of full and effective participation in the governance and management of protected areas, unsustainable tourism, military operations (such as low level flying), dominant non-indigenous educational systems including residential schools, religious imposition, violation of intellectual property rights, indigenous identity stealing to access rights and lands, and vandalism;

*Recognizing* the need for adequate financial and human resources for indigenous peoples to exercise their specific rights and inherent responsibilities in co-management processes to achieve true environmental co-governance;

*Emphasizing* that separating biological and cultural diversity in conservation, sustainable development, and decision-making leads to diverging and conflicting agendas, leading to varying and sometimes competing interests;

The Dialogue considered the leading role of indigenous peoples in maintaining and enhancing biocultural diversity through the following themes: indigenous languages and traditional forms of knowledge; livelihoods, food sovereignty, health, and the nexus of nature, culture, and well-being; culturally-specific applications of communications technologies; inter-legalities and indigenous rights; and indigenous peoples' stewardship of their territories of life.

### **Next Steps Forward**

We, the participants, therefore recommend the following actions that would create an enabling environment for thriving communities of life:

#### **Actions at Local Level**

*Support* indigenous peoples in advancing indigenous-led strategies and actions to protect, revitalize, and sustain indigenous languages and knowledge systems by supporting intergenerational language and knowledge transfer through formal and non-formal education;

*Support* indigenous peoples in their stewardship and sustainable use of their traditional territories, lands and waters, including through Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, tribal parks, and conserved territories and areas (ICCAs);

*Support* youth engagement in building a future based on their communities' cultural values, including indigenous knowledge systems, values, and identities as well as through formal educational opportunities such as universities and graduate programs.

#### **Actions at National Level and Provincial/State/Territorial Level**

Call upon Governments to:

*Recognize* historical injustices and destruction that indigenous people have suffered regarding their culture, language, identity and spirituality, and construct processes of reconciliation and cultural restoration;

*Accelerate* the recognition of indigenous peoples' ancestral lands and waters as a means to transformational change in the protection of biocultural diversity, for all life on Earth;

*Honour and secure* the rights identified in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,<sup>5</sup> including those that foster biocultural diversity by upholding indigenous peoples' ownership, use, and management of their territories, lands, and waters and respect for their knowledge, cultures, livelihoods, and self-governance;

*Recognize* the diversity of indigenous peoples and that each local context is unique and therefore requires different context-specific applications of indigenous peoples' rights, which respect specific views, needs and priorities;

*Respect* distinct indigenous knowledge systems, spirituality, beliefs, practices and cultures; long-standing rules, principles and laws of governance and management systems of their territories, traditional lands and waters and sacred sites and areas and related knowledge;

*Adapt* governmental regulations and laws to better respect and reflect indigenous visions;

*Respect and make space* for indigenous leadership, including contemporary and customary indigenous governance systems;

*Ensure* the effective participation of indigenous peoples in all matters of relevance to them;

*Recognize and protect* sacred sites and features, including within protected and conserved areas, and respect indigenous peoples' responsibility to care for them;

*Recognize, respect, and support* indigenous peoples' customary land tenure and customary stewardship, sustainable use, and management of their traditional territories and ancestral lands and waters, including harvesting within protected and conserved areas and their governance and co-governance of protected and conserved areas, including as Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, tribal parks, and conserved territories and areas (ICCAs);

*Fully implement* existing and develop new commitments regarding traditional knowledge and customary sustainable use;

*Support* the repatriation and restoration of languages, traditional knowledge and related information, and artefacts (intangible and tangible cultural heritage) to assist indigenous peoples in protecting, revitalizing, and strengthening their knowledge systems;

*Respect* confidentiality of and access to culturally-sensitive information and indigenous control over such information;

*Develop* holistic approaches to remove any conceptual and practical separation of biological and cultural diversities from siloed colonial approaches to conservation, sustainable development, and decision-making;

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<sup>5</sup> A/RES/61/295.

*Remove* the negative or perverse incentives that threaten biocultural diversity and harm nature;

*Respect* customary procedures, community protocols, or other guidance for respectful relationships, as developed by the relevant indigenous peoples, especially as it may pertain to traditional knowledge, as well as related resources;

*Advance* co-governance between indigenous peoples and external governments, agencies, NGOs and other key stakeholders, based on equity and positive reciprocity, drawing on indigenous knowledge systems, as fundamental to taking care of ancestral lands and waters;

*Create* and sustain conditions for mobilizing indigenous knowledge systems by the knowledge holders to guide conservation, sustainable development, and decision-making;

*Support* communities developing education based on their own cultural values as well as efforts that enable more culturally-appropriate education with direct benefits to the community. University curricula must also change to accommodate diverse, including indigenous, worldviews;

*Recognize* the importance of meaningful dialogues done in a good way within an ethical space, cognizant of the time and resources necessary to support long-term relationships built on trust, respect, transparency, and accountability.

#### **Actions for International Entities including Conservation Organizations**

*Be* a good ally to indigenous peoples, working collaboratively in a good way, based on compassion and positive reciprocity;

*Ensure* the effective participation of indigenous peoples as partners and rights holders in the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, at all levels, including in the development of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework;

*Use* the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a minimal human rights framework when working with indigenous peoples;

*Call on* proponents of nature conservation to engage in a rights-based approach respectfully with indigenous peoples and ensure indigenous peoples' worldviews, responsibilities, relations, values and priorities are appropriately reflected in conservation strategies and actions;

*Support* indigenous peoples' stewardship and sustainable use of their traditional territories, lands, and waters, including through protected and conserved areas governed by them or co-governed by them as Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas and ICCAs with respect for their knowledge, values, and management practices;

*Strengthen* actions, strategies and biocultural indicators that link biological and cultural diversity through the lens of relationships between humans and nature;

*Develop* biocultural indicators of well-being rooted in place-based cultural perspectives, values and knowledge systems, through culturally-appropriate and ethical processes of co-development, co-validation, and knowledge co-creation;

*Develop* indicators, both context specific and generalizable, particularly those that relate to traditional livelihoods, land and marine stewardship, food and water sovereignty and security and the relationships among cultures, economies and ecosystems;

*Support* indigenous peoples in their efforts to restore, protect, and sustain their traditional foods, diets, and lifeways;

*Explore* the relationships between traditional diets, traditional medicines and human health and impacts of socio-environmental and climatic changes on food sovereignty and human health and well-being;

*Recognize* Indigenous peoples' reciprocal relationship with their traditional lands and waters, including through governance, management and conservation of their collective territories through bio-cultural approaches, such as Indigenous Protected Areas, Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, tribal parks, and conserved territories and areas (ICCAs);

*Ensure* that indigenous ways of knowing are integral to biocultural diversity monitoring, conservation, sustainable development, and decision-making, leading to equitable outcomes;

*Increase* resources available to indigenous peoples for engaging in biocultural diversity monitoring, conservation, sustainable development, and decision-making;

*Develop and Support* ethical processes that ensure respectful braiding of oral, written and spiritual strands of multiple knowledge systems in the service of Mother Earth;

*Ensure* culturally-appropriate conservation and restoration of cultural keystone species and spaces;

*Include, promote, and advocate* for indigenous-led research on wildlife, the environment and resources, which should be supported and implemented by government, industry and academia;

*Apply* the precautionary principle to prevent possible harm to indigenous cultures, lifestyles and people themselves as well as to prevent possible harm to biodiversity and the environment;

*Ensure* capacity development and on-going funding of indigenous peoples is provided so that they are empowered to exercise their rights and responsibilities over their ancestral lands and waters.

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