



# International Indian Treaty Council

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **JOSE FRANCISCO CALI TZAY ELECTED AS PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, THE FIRST INDIGENOUS EXPERT TO HOLD SUCH A POSITION IN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM**

**Geneva, Switzerland, February 3, 2014:** Francisco Cali Tzay, Mayan Kaqchikel from Guatemala, was elected today to a two-year term as President of the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) on the first day of its 84<sup>th</sup> session.

The CERD is the Treaty Monitoring Body for the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), and one of nine International Human Rights Treaties within the UN system. The ICERD is legally-binding for the 175 countries (State parties) which have ratified it to date. The CERD was the first Treaty Monitoring body to be established within the UN System and is responsible for reviewing the compliance of all State parties with the provisions of the ICERD. It also makes recommendations as to how States should change their policies and practices to comply with their obligations under the ICERD to eliminate racial discrimination in their countries.

International Chief Wilton Littlechild, Ermineskin Cree Nation and Chair of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP), attended the session to witness the seating of Mr. Cali Tzay as President of the CERD. He addressed the CERD and confirmed its historic importance:

“I think it is simply outstanding and a very important milestone in the journey of Indigenous Peoples toward full, direct and equal participation in decision-making on all levels. It is also significant in that Francisco Cali's skills, dedication and leadership qualities are being acknowledged by a UN Treaty Body that will open future opportunities for others. He has worked very hard and deserves this recognition in a way that is consistent with and also implements the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I congratulate Francisco Cali Tzay in once again lifting up what the Treaty relationship is all about – partnership.”

International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) Executive Director Andrea Carmen, Yaqui Nation, also attended the session to witness this historic advance for Indigenous Peoples' participation in the UN.

Francisco Cali was elected as a member of the CERD in 2004 as the first and only indigenous member of a UN Treaty Monitoring body. During his previous two terms, he served as the CERD's Vice President and also as Chair the CERD's Urgent Action and Early Warning Complaint Procedure. The CERD's procedures have been used very effectively in recent years by Indigenous Peoples to address violations and threats to their rights to lands and resources, cultural practices, subsistence, sacred sites, free prior and informed consent and the rights affirmed in their Nation-to-Nation Treaties, among others.

Francisco Cali has served in the leadership of a number of Indigenous Peoples' organizations, Human Rights bodies and governmental agencies defending Indigenous Peoples Human rights in Guatemala and internationally. These include the Directorate of Human Rights, Rights of the Indigenous Peoples, Environment, Culture, and International Humanitarian Rights of the Guatemala Foreign Ministry, the Presidential Commission against Racial Discrimination in

Guatemala, the Presidential National Reparation Commissions, CEPRODI (Centro de Proyectos de Desarrollo Integral Indígena) and the Indigenous Peoples Rights Program of CALDH (Legal Center for Human Rights). He has served as the President of the IITC Board of Directors since 2000.

The International Indian Treaty Council joins with Indigenous Peoples, Guatemala and other UN member States, and the international human rights community in warmly congratulating Francisco Cali Tzay upon his historic election.

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