

**65<sup>th</sup> Annual UN DPI/NGO Conference**  
**“2015 and Beyond: Our Action Agenda”**

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Opening presentation by Andrea Carmen, International Indian Treaty Council, for  
the Indigenous Peoples Major Group

Lios em Chaniabo Uma Wayaim. Respectful Greetings My relatives.

The Right to Development is a Human Right. It is inextricably linked to the right of Self Determination affirmed for all Peoples in Article 1 in Common of the International Human Rights Covenants as follows: *“All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”*

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the UN General Assembly on September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2007 as the minimum standard for the survival, dignity and well-being of the world’s Indigenous Peoples. Imagine our shock and dismay when what started out as several references to Indigenous Peoples as Peoples in the first versions of the Zero Draft outcome document from the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals were totally deleted by the time the June 30<sup>th</sup> draft was presented for debate at the 13<sup>th</sup> and final session last month. That text used the much-diminished term “Indigenous and local communities” only one time, and made no reference to Indigenous Peoples at all.

We had hoped to focus in the final OWG session on the inclusion of key elements that Indigenous Peoples had defined as priorities in the Post 2015 sustainable development agenda. These included culture as the 4<sup>th</sup> pillar of sustainable development, provisions to safeguard rights to lands and resources, food sovereignty and Free Prior and Informed Consent. Instead, throughout the last night and into the early morning hours of the final session, our basic and fundamental recognition as Peoples in the text remained in question.

Indigenous Peoples were finally included in two paragraphs of the outcome document, one pertaining to food security and one pertaining to education. The core issues of rights to land and resources, self-determination and FPIC that we prioritized from the beginning of this process were watered down or completely eliminated. In the end we had to fight just to be mentioned at all. I take this opportunity to thank the States and NGO’s that stood with us in that fight.

So where does this leave us in the quest for partnership as we look ahead in this process? The answer is not easy. Too often Indigenous Peoples are still considered as either expendable or outright obstacles to development, or else as “sectors of civil society” rather than distinct self-governing and self-determining Peoples and Nations. We are wanted in the room but are not often welcomed as equals at the decision-making table.

But despite these challenges, we are not prepared to throw in the towel. There is too much at stake. We know we must stay fully engaged in this process in order to fulfil our sacred responsibilities to future generations and Mother Earth. Our prophecies and traditional stories tell us that we are now in a life and death struggle for survival, facing unprecedented threats caused by climate change, massive destruction by extractive industries and the rampant, and in some cases deliberate, diminishment of bio-diversity including genetic modification of seeds, food plants and animals. We agree with the Concept Note for this Conference that we are now presented with a once-in-a generation opportunity, and perhaps a multi-generational imperative, for transformational change that requires unified and ambitious action.

We propose that this transformational change needs to begin by transforming the way that we work together. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in its preamble, refers to the spirit of partnership and mutual respect together, in one phrase.

So what kind of agenda for action can we commit to together, as true partners? It will need be an agenda that respects Indigenous Peoples’ political and cultural identity; that respects our rights to the lands, territories and resources that we have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired as affirmed in Article 26 of the UN Declaration; that upholds our Free Prior and informed Consent, including full participation in planning as well as implementation of projects and programs that would affect us; and that values Indigenous Peoples’ contributions and time-tested wisdom about living in Harmony and Respect with the Natural World.

We need to work together to give our collective futures a fighting chance. We have things to teach and things to learn from one another. Indigenous Peoples will continue to engage in this process in the spirit of partnership based on mutual respect with both States and civil society whenever possible.

We must stand together and we must chose life. Cheoque ustesia, thank you.