



International Indian Treaty Council
Consejo Internacional de Tratados Indios

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A YOUNG WARRIOR FOR MOTHER EARTH HAS RETURNED HOME



Chris Honahnie with other Indigenous youth knowledge holders from Russia, Canada, Ecuador, Kenya and the Arctic at UNFCCC COP 26 in Glasgow Scotland, November 2021; Chris delivering wheatberries to Diné families in New Mexico during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020

Tucson Arizona, December 31, 2022: Yesterday, December 30th, 2022, Isawhoya (Christopher “Chris” Honahnie), Hopi and Diné, was laid to rest in Moenkopi (Mùñqapi) adjacent to Tuba City Arizona, in a traditional Hopi burial ceremony.

Chris turned 28 years old on December 12th. He passed away in a car accident in Payson, Arizona near Flagstaff along with Tayla Tracy, Diné Nation, described by her family as Chris’ “best friend.” His beloved dog and constant companion Zeke survived the accident and is recovering with Chris’ family. In his Hopi tradition, Chris will begin his journey to the home of his ancestors today, where we are sure he will be welcomed with great honor and open arms.

The services were attended by Andrea Carmen, IITC’s Executive Director, his IITC co-workers Summer Aubrey, Amy Juan and Janene Yazzie, and three of his former co-workers from the San Xavier Cooperative Farm in Tucson Arizona, where he lived, worked and attended the University of Arizona for several years.

Chris began working at the International Indian Treaty Council in 2019 after attending IITC’s 4th International Indigenous Peoples Corn Conference in Tlaxcala Mexico, At the time of his passing Chris was IITC’s Food Sovereignty Program Co-coordinator. His work included bringing together

traditional Indigenous food producers to share their seeds, methods and knowledge with one another, and attending international gatherings to defend the resilience of Indigenous knowledge and practices in the face of climate change. Working with his family to take care of the soil and seeds in his own homeland was his greatest commitment, and the foundation of his life's work and purpose. Everywhere he spoke, he always credited his mother and his grandmother for the teachings he was able to share and pass on.

Chris was a resolute practitioner of his Hopi ceremonial way of life and spoke his language. He was a strong advocate for the importance of Indigenous young peoples continuing to learn and speak their languages as a foundation of Indigenous food sovereignty and resilience in the face of climate change and spoke to this issue in a presentation to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York this year.

IITC's Board of Directors, staff and affiliates, as well many Indigenous leaders from around the world who had the opportunity to know him, are grieving along with his parents, grandparents, brothers, aunts and uncles and a large and loving family who are devastated by this loss. After IITC's Executive Director sent a message with the tragic news on Wednesday night, messages of shock, sadness, and condolences for Chris' family began to pour in from Indigenous leaders, co-workers, friends and allies from round the world, including Aotearoa (New Zealand), Hawaii, Norway, Peru, Guatemala, Mexico, Kenya, Boriken (Puerto Rico), Panama, Nicaragua and many other countries. They referred to him as "Full of light and wisdom and "a complete person even at his young age." They remembered his smile, kindness, intelligence, calm and steady presence, wisdom, humility, cheerful good humor, clarity of purpose, and commitment to defend Indigenous rights, seeds, spirituality and ways of life. Many also recalled his generosity and unhesitating willingness to offer help and support, with a good heart, to anyone who needed it.

Chris was an example, inspiration and role model for all who knew him, young and old. As a recognized young knowledge holder attending the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties in 2021 and 2022 (UNFCCC COP 26 and 27) Chris stepped up to provide support and guidance to other participating Indigenous knowledge-holders, including elders who were attending these vast and sprawling UN sessions and traveling outside of their home countries for the first time. Several of the messages received by IITC since his passing expressed their appreciation for the help he provided them.

Despite our heartbreak, IITC is also very gratified that we were able to provide Chris with the opportunity to share his light, knowledge, and example of selfless service with the world through his participation in UN Conferences and Indigenous Peoples gatherings in India, Germany, Egypt, Scotland, Alaska, Italy and Mexico, among others. In 2021 Chris produced a video featuring Indigenous traditional food producers from North and Latin America, the Pacific and Arctic, including himself, for the UN Development Program which has been seen by over 100,000 viewers around the world. He also coordinated and moderated the Indigenous youth roundtable at the UNFCCC COP 27 session just last month in Sharm el-Sheikh Egypt.

In closing, we will share the words sent by Mayan elder and spiritual leader Rosalina Tuyuk, one of the knowledge holders who Chris supported at UNFCCC COP 26 in November 2021 in Glasgow Scotland. Her words speak for all of us at IITC: “I knew him as such a talented young man, full of life, supportive, who worked with political clarity on our rights as millennial Peoples. May the universe embrace him on his journey of return.”



Chris and Zeke in the IITC Tucson Office

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The International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) is an organization of Indigenous Peoples from North, Central, South America, the Caribbean and the Pacific working for the Sovereignty and Self Determination of Indigenous Peoples and the recognition and protection of Indigenous Rights, Treaties, Traditional Cultures and Sacred Lands.