

THE DECLARATION OF TOOHNI' DINÉ

AUGUST 30, 2023

We are Corn Peoples from the Indigenous lands now known as North, Central and South America. We came together from August 28-30, at the time of the sacred harvest to honor our relations as an international family of Indigenous Peoples, for the 6th International Indigenous Peoples Corn Conference in the homelands of the Diné Nation, near the sacred Rock with Wings, Tooh' Diné Bi Keyah (Shiprock, New Mexico).

We began by giving thanks in Diné, greeting the sun and harvest ceremonies where we offered prayers and thanksgiving for life's renewal and regeneration. We recommitted ourselves to the corn pollen road and asked for spiritual help and healing for our Earth Mother who has suffered so much abuse and damage but continues to provide for us. The Conference hosts, the International Indian Treaty Council and TooBah along with all the participants, express our heartfelt appreciation to our hosts, the Chili, and Betsy Yazzie Family, and the Shiprock community, for their generous hospitality. We also thank the donors, supporters, and volunteers for helping provide what was needed to bring us together in this way.

For this Conference we built upon the firm foundation set down for us by the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th International Indigenous Peoples Corn Conferences held in Santo Domingo Tamaltepec and Juchitan Oaxaca, Okemah Oklahoma, Tecpan Guatemala and Vicente Guerrero Tlaxcala Mexico. We endorse and support the Declarations from those gatherings as the basis and inspiration for our work at this gathering and going forward.

We affirm that Corn has its own sacred knowledge, being, and teachings that have enabled us to make it a central part of our lives in many climates, cultures, and eco-systems. This knowledge and spirit unite us as Corn Peoples as we remember how to listen and talk to the corn as our ancestors did. Corn speaks to us about the generosity and richness of the land and teaches us about our own lives and responsibilities as we care for and use it at each of its own life stages. Corn is iiná (life), and iiná (life) is us, in that way we are speaking as the voice of the corn because the corn is speaking through us. Planting, growing, preparing, and eating our corn in all its original varieties are sacred acts essential for our survival. The prayers, songs, and words we offer for planting, harvesting, preparing, and eating our corn are ceremonies and thanksgivings.

The Corn reminds us of the sacred relationships that bind us to the natural world and binds the natural world together in harmony. We reaffirm that the winds, the colors, and energies of the four directions, the soil, water, sun, moon, stars, large and small life forms that live on and in the earth, and our ceremonies, cultures, and spiritual practices, are all essential parts of our traditional food systems. We recognize the importance of all our sacred relatives as critical components of this harmony including our animal, bird, and insect relatives. They sustain our foods and plant medicines by distribution of seeds, pollinating and eco-system support.

Corn unites us and teaches us to work together, and we are grateful. Corn has brought us together at this gathering to share our struggles, knowledge, practices, and seeds. For Indigenous Peoples, corn is not a business and the food we produce is not for profit. We reject the imposition of the capitalist and colonial world view and food production system which has warped our relationship with our

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original food systems, poisoned our lands, waters and Peoples with pesticides and extractive industries, and undermined the original biodiversity and resilience of our seeds, foods and medicines through genetic modification and patenting. We commit to renewing our original relationship of spirituality and reciprocal caring for the totality of our food systems that is the foundation of our ways of life and understanding of agro-ecology. Central to this is the protection and defense of all bodies and forms of water— our springs, streams, rivers, lakes, ponds, springs, rains and snow falls, oceans, fog, mists, and clouds— which we honor as sacred beings interconnected to one another.

We also commit to provide mutual support to one another as we defend our rights to land and water, health, cultural heritage, free prior and informed consent, and self-determination, which are essential for the full exercise of our food sovereignty. Global solidarity and moral, political, spiritual support will strengthen us as we battle and defend our homelands and ways of life in the face of the climate crisis caused by the ongoing unabating corporate and government addiction to fossil fuels, and the extraction of minerals, water, and other vital resources from Indigenous Lands.

Our knowledge is collective and intergenerational and cannot be patented or owned by other entities. We call for respect of this principle by the academic and scientific community, corporations, States, and United Nations bodies. We affirm that our seeds, plants, and animals are sacred and must not be subject to genetic modification or patenting by corporations under any circumstances.

We recognize and honor the vital role of our traditional knowledge holders, spiritual and cultural leaders, traditional healers, farmers, and other practitioners who have continued to protect and preserve our ways of knowing and healing, sometimes in the face of repression and criminalization. We also give thanks for our elders who have the living memory of planting and growing without chemicals and modified seeds. The prayers, songs, and stories they gave us keep these ways grounded and strong. We will ask in a respectful way for them to continue to share their wisdom and practical knowledge so that they can be strengthened and restored in our communities. We commit as the next generations to step up, learn and transmit this knowledge to the future generations when our elders pass to the beautiful homes of our ancestors.

We greatly appreciate the vision, determination, fighting spirit and desire for knowledge of our Indigenous youth, the emerging leaders and next generation farmers who are the key to our Peoples' survival. We hear and share their concerns about lack of access to land and land loss that is making it difficult to continue these practices and affirm that land rights and Land Back is a critical part of restoring traditional food systems and the landscapes and ecosystems that sustain them. We also recognize and honor the essential leadership role of Indigenous women as holders and caretakers of the traditional knowledge, practices, ceremonies, and seeds that are essential for the protection of our food sovereignty and the transmission of our lifeways to future generations. We thank them for their role in handing down the many delicious and healthy ways to prepare corn which we have enjoyed so much at this gathering.

We celebrate the work of the Indigenous food producers and knowledge holders who shared seeds and growing methods during this Conference. Indigenous Peoples' knowledge systems, ways of and

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scientific and ecological knowledges and our time-tested practices provide us with ways to restore our traditional methods of food production and to renew, repair and rejuvenate ecosystems that have been depleted and contaminated by industrial agriculture, mining, and other forms of contamination.

Mining, drilling, fracking, and tar sands extraction have already caused extreme damage to our lands, waters, and food systems as well as our collective and family health and have created the climate crisis that we are now facing. Tailings and mining wastes from past uranium mining continue to contaminate us, causing cancer and intergenerational impacts. Gold mining has left mercury and other heavy metals in our eco- and food systems, and our bodies with devastating impacts on our children and unborn generations. The Gold King mining disaster that contaminated the San Juan River in 2015 impacted the river, land, and food production in Shiprock and the Diné Nation overall, from which the Diné food producers have not yet recovered.

Mining uses large quantities of water that is the basis of our life, food production, and health. Now the governments and corporations want to renew uranium mining and implement mining of so-called “transition minerals” such as lithium, helium, copper, and hydrogen on sacred lands of Indigenous Peoples. They are false solutions to climate change and cause further damage to our ecosystems. We affirm that true “just transition” must be based on the rights of Indigenous Peoples including to free prior informed consent of rights holders, food sovereignty, and protection of rights to our lands, waters, sacred places, and ways of life. We stand with Indigenous Peoples including the Diné who are opposing such false solutions that will cause further harm to our Peoples and Earth Mother.

We also recognize that this environmental contamination has weakened our immune systems and therefore our resistance to pandemics such as we experienced with COVID-19. We mourn the recent loss of many elders and their vast wealth of experience and knowledge but commit to carry on the teachings and prophecies that they left us and pass them on to future generations. We also commit to strengthen our use of traditional medicines and foods to rebuild our collective and community health and resiliency and to respond to the pandemics that we know are coming.

We recognize that we must also impact the discussions taking place on the issues that affect our Food Sovereignty at the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), UN Environmental Programme, Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the World Intellectual Property Organization where our food and knowledge systems, cultural heritage, land and waters, biological diversity, seeds, ecosystems, health, and other aspects of our lives are addressed. Traditional knowledge holders, human and environmental rights defenders, and Indigenous food producers are making vital contributions to impact global policies and decisions that affect us based on the richness of our living cultures, Indigenous sciences, and lived experiences. Indigenous food producers and knowledge holders, including women and youth must have greater opportunities to have an effective voice in these processes, and to be informed about opportunities for input into global discussions that directly affect our rights and lives.

We are warriors in defense of corn as a vital part of our traditional lifeways. Our ancestral memories,

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histories and values must be kept alive, and our inherent rights must be defended. We therefore make the following collective commitments and calls to action:

- 1) To revitalize and protect our traditional lifeways, Indigenous ways of knowing, songs, stories, languages, histories, and sciences, including our profound weather, moon, water, sun, and star knowledges which are all still strong and alive and to pass them down to the coming generations.
- 2) To return to our original ways of planting, growing, saving, storing, sharing, and harvesting all the natural varieties and colors of our male and female original corn. They are naturally climate and insect resistant and have high nutritional value.
- 3) To demand a halt to fossil fuel production by corporations and governments (including federal and tribal governments) as an urgent matter of life and death for our Peoples and the natural world as we confront the increasing impacts of the climate crisis.
- 4) To be Earth Defenders so that the corn, and we, will survive, and to defend our inherent rights to our lands, waters and other resources, cultural and ancestral heritage including seeds, and our ceremonies and spiritual practices.
- 5) To insist that States comply with their responsibilities to uphold the rights affirmed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the OAS American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, ILO Convention 169, the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, Nation to Nation Treaties with Indigenous Peoples and other international standards that recognize and respect our rights.
- 6) To call on international bodies to fully implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the internationally recognized minimum standard for the survival, dignity, and well-being of Indigenous Peoples. Specific strategies we endorse for work in UN bodies include:
 - a. Redrafting Article 8 j of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity which in its current draft undermines the rights of Indigenous Peoples to own, protect and control their cultural heritage include seeds and knowledge of flora and fauna and to have free prior and informed consent regarding development of their lands, territories, and resources.
 - b. Opposing implementation of the CBD's 30 x 30 Initiative to create "protected areas" on the traditional homelands of Indigenous Peoples without their Free Prior and Informed consent and without formally and legally recognizing, respecting, and demarcating their original and Treaty lands, many times forcibly relocating them. If Indigenous Peoples themselves chose to create food sovereignty zones or protected traditional use areas, these must be fully supported and respected under the full legal jurisdiction of the respective Indigenous Peoples themselves.
 - c. Participating and supporting in a planned spiritual fast by Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples at FAO's World Food Forum in October 2023 to protest the corporate capture of the FAO and its responses to world hunger.
 - d. Amending the International Code of Conduct of Pesticides Management to include the rights of Indigenous Peoples to FPIC regarding the use of pesticides on their lands and territories, and challenging national and international laws and Conventions which allow countries which have banned the use of deadly and dangerous pesticides in their own countries to produce and export them to developing countries where they are often used with little to no

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regulation in the lands of Indigenous Peoples in violation of Article 29 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

- e. Supporting the call by Indigenous Peoples and UN Indigenous experts to halt the conflation of Indigenous Peoples with other non-Indigenous entities such as “local communities,” minorities, or vulnerable groups, which undermines the rights of Indigenous Peoples in our work in all UN bodies and processes, as well as in our homelands.
- f. Challenging the UNFCCC and its member States to cease the promotion of false, misleading and destructive so-called solutions based on carbon offsets, mega dams, plantations and other such projects proposed under names like “Nature Based Solutions”, “Rights of Nature”, geo-engineering, carbon sequestration or carbon capture, and “net zero” projects that further colonize Indigenous Peoples’ lands and territories. We call on the next conference of the parties of the UNFCCC in Dubai to take a firm stand to phase out all fossil fuel production as the highest priority and only true solution to climate change. In addition, we challenge the current international discussions about Loss and Damage focusing on monetary compensations to include the full participation of Indigenous Peoples and to focus on prevention rather than compensation for losses of our culture, knowledge, biodiversity, land, fresh water, and food systems that cannot be restored or repaid with money. Indigenous Peoples need to be leading conversations and decision-making on the causes, impacts and solutions to climate change internationally, nationally, and locally.
- g. Opposing the mining of “transition minerals” and uranium carried out in the lands of indigenous Peoples without our consent in the name of climate solutions and to insist that policies of “just transition” be carried out with full respect for our inherent rights as affirmed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of indigenous Peoples, including Free Prior and Informed Consent.
- h. Planting, growing, preparing, and eating our corn in all its original varieties is a sacred act and is essential for our survival.
- i. Standing united with the Indigenous Peoples who are working to defend our rights to Indigenous traditional and the sacred life spirit of all living beings called “genetic resources” at the upcoming diplomatic conference on an instrument on genetic resources at the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) to provide positive protection. We clearly state that as traditional food producers and rights advocates, we will not accept any legally binding outcome of this process that does not fully recognize and uphold the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples affirmed as the minimum standards in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including rights to cultural heritage and FPIC.
- j. Building opportunities to engage actively our knowledge holders at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, as long as our rights to safeguard our Indigenous traditional scientific, ecological and technical knowledges and knowledge systems are respected.
- k. Demanding that the States uphold the commitment they made in the Paris Agreement and ensure that the rise in global temperature be kept to no more than 1.5 degrees centigrade.
- l. Encouraging and facilitating the full and effective participation of Indigenous youth in all UN processes where decisions are being made which affect them, now and into the future. We support the current initiative by Indigenous youth to create an Indigenous Youth Caucus in coordination with the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change which will

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be initiated at COP 28 in Dubai. We also encourage that similar initiatives be undertaken at the CBD and in other UN bodies, and call for these bodies to support and fund this direct participation. We also commit to build capacity and provide training for Indigenous youth to enable their full and effective participation in relevant negotiating processes.

- 7) To oppose all forms of environmental racism and environmental violence including international trafficking of banned pesticides, appropriation of our lands, waters and growing areas by multinational corporations, industrial agriculture, mono-cultivation, invasive species, and extractive industries such as mining, fracking, drilling and pipelines. We commit to call attention to the links between mining and other extractive industries and sexual violence and trafficking carried out against Indigenous women and girls.
- 8) To recommit to include our youth and children from the youngest ages in traditional food growing and production, to ensure the transference of knowledge, and to create pathways to leadership and inclusion of youth in all areas of work to defend food sovereignty. To ensure that they continue to have opportunities to learn their Peoples' histories and stories, speak their languages, and be educated in both their own and mainstream educational systems if they so choose.
- 9) To resist the corporate control, dispossession, genetic modification and monopolization of seeds and plant medicines which are the gifts passed down from the hands of our ancestors, and to support each other in the repatriation/rematriation of our seeds and plant medicines that have been collected and banked by corporations, collectors, universities, museums, institutions and non-Indigenous organizations, including by taking action on the international level.
- 10) To continue our call for protection of Indigenous traditional plant medicines whose existence is threatened by development, environmental contamination, and climate change, and expand the knowledge about their use among our Peoples.
- 11) To call for the protection of our corn fields as a sacred site where corn and other traditional foods and medicines are birthed. This reaffirms and expands previous declarations that recognize all birthing places as sacred spaces, including women's wombs, salmon spawning water ways, and landscapes such as the Arctic Wildlife Refuge, the birthing place of the Porcupine Caribou herd.
- 12) To support, strengthen, and re-establish our seed and knowledge trading relationships with our own, and other Indigenous Peoples, to build resiliency of our food systems with an emphasis on saving and using seeds that are drought resistant and adaptable to dry land farming as well as extreme climate events (droughts, heat waves, floods, high winds and freezes) such as we are experiencing now in our homelands.
- 13) To take special measures to protect, preserve and restore the health of our water systems, including restoring methods for water saving and collecting, practicing, and revitalizing our water ceremonies, including by our women, and opposing all forms of development, including those that contaminate and use our life-giving water unsustainably.
- 14) To demand protection for Indigenous human rights, environmental and food sovereignty defenders who are criminalized for standing up against the appropriation of their lands and the imposition of mega-projects that are displacing their Peoples from their sacred places and food production areas.
- 15) To commit to purchase and eat Indigenous locally produced organic food to support Indigenous producers, reduce the carbon footprint of imported foods, and ensure our own health and

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resistance to disease, and to develop markets for Indigenous produced and grown original foods.

- 16) To acknowledge that many “Federally Recognized” tribal governments were created by the United States, Canada, and other States for the purpose of expediting the approval of mineral extraction from our homelands. In many cases they do not reflect the self-determined original governance structures of Indigenous Peoples. We commit to exercising and upholding our internationally recognized right to self-determination by creating governance structures, representative bodies and processes that more accurately reflect the original governance principles and structures of our Peoples based on our traditional, original, and natural laws and protecting the inherent sovereignty of our Nations and the sacredness of our Earth Mother.
- 17) To keep organizing and building support for the International Indigenous Peoples Corn Conferences as essential for strengthening our alliances and sharing our knowledge and mutual support. We accept the invitation of the Mayan Peoples of Belize to host the next Corn Conference, with the support of the Traditional Native American Farmers Association, IITC, and the Indigenous Peoples Alliance for Food Sovereignty, Traditional Knowledge, and Climate Change, in 2025. IITC will also accept the proposed invitation of the Kuna General Congress to hold a gathering in 2025 in conjunction with the 100th anniversary of the Revolution of Guna Dules focused on the protection of Indigenous Peoples Food Sovereignty in response to Climate Change in Guna Yala Panama. We also support the call for an International Day of Prayer to be held June 21st, 2024, as proposed by Treaty 6 First Nations at this gathering.

We came together to renew our sacred obligations, relationships, and responsibilities to protect our corn, original seeds, waters, the natural balance of the climate and the vitality of the natural world in all its manifestations. Our prophecies warn that climate change is coming, and our lived experiences tell us that it is already here. Whether we will fulfill our responsibilities to ensure that our children and future generations survive these changes is up to us.

We will continue to build a united front, to learn, share and educate, defend our rights, rebuild our communities, protect our seeds, restore our lifeways, and resist the powerful forces that seek to undermine them. Every time we meet, our collective knowledge evolves. We will plant our corn, protect our ecosystems and Earth Mother, and continue our own ways of living, being and knowing. We will continue to stand together as warriors on the side of life. In this way we, our children, and future generations, will survive as who we are.

Adopted by consensus on August 30, 2023