

# **THE DECLARATION OF NUUK CHEIL**

## **7<sup>TH</sup> International Indigenous Peoples Corn Conference,**

### **Maya Center Village, Belize**

### **May 11, 2025**

We are Corn Peoples from the Indigenous lands now known as North, Central and South America and the Caribbean. We came together for the 7<sup>th</sup> International Indigenous Peoples Corn Conference in the beautiful and abundant homelands of the Mopan Mayan Peoples of Belize at the Maya Center Village. We will always be grateful for the dances, songs, food and hospitality they shared with us.

We began each day in ceremony, greeting the sun and the four directions and offering prayers for protection of the sacred corn and our Peoples, and giving thanks for life's renewal and regeneration that the corn represents. We also thank Ich Komonil, our Conference hosts, along with the International Indian Treaty Council and the Traditional Native American Farmers Association for their work to co-coordinate this historic event. We express our appreciation to the donors, supporters, and volunteers for helping to provide what was needed to bring us together in this way.

We affirm that the Corn Mother is a sacred life-giving being, with its own spirit and knowledge, that we have been given to care for and protect, so that it will protect us and give us life. Corn is a medicine that we use for healing. It is a basis for our understating and interconnection with the stars, the moon and sun, the waters of the world, the life- giving cycles of our women and all female nations, and the sacred inter-related elements of living soil and seeds. For us, as Corn Peoples, planting, growing, preparing, and eating our corn in all its original varieties are sacred acts essential for our survival. The prayers, songs and words of thanks we offer are essential elements of our spiritual lives and identities.

We recognize that although we come from different Peoples and different countries and are now divided by the colonial borders imposed on our traditional territories, we are one. We face the same struggles and threats. These include the ongoing appropriation of our lands, waters, seeds and knowledge without our Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), genetic modification of our seeds and plants, extractive industries, commercial tourism, and indiscriminate use of agro-chemicals in our territories. We also know that the climate crisis and its causes, impacts and false solutions including carbon injection, oil palm plantations, and imposed mining of so called "transition minerals", are having extreme impacts on our lands, territories, waters, food sovereignty cultures, and ways of life.

We reaffirm that as Indigenous Peoples, practitioners and knowledge holders, we hold the solutions in our hands, based on our ancestral knowledge, practices, sciences and technologies passed down from our ancestors. Our knowledge about growing and producing our foods and seeds, protecting our ecosystems and using our waters in a sustainable way not only helps us to adapt, but can avert and reduce the impacts of the climate crisis on our territories and food systems. On this basis, we will continue to actively engage in United Nations policy discussions and bodies where issues impacting our Food Sovereignty are addressed as long as our knowledge systems, right to own and protect our cultural heritage and our right to FPIC are fully recognized and upheld. These include current UN processes addressing Climate Change, Pesticides, Biodiversity, Environmental Contaminants such as Mercury and Plastics, Desertification, Agriculture, Fisheries and Genetic integrity of our seeds.

Based on these principles, we commit to actively engage and build participation, including by our youth, women, traditional food producers and knowledge-holders, at the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and Committee on Agriculture (COAG), the Joint Meeting on Pesticides Management, the UN Environmental Programme, the Minamata Convention on Mercury, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the UN Convention on Desertification, the RAMSAR Convention on Wetlands, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the development of a new UN Convention on Plastics, the Human Rights Council, the Committee on Food Security and its Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism, the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD+20) and the World Intellectual Property Organization.

We affirm the language included in December 2022, after a concerted struggle, to safeguard the unique, distinct, collective rights of Indigenous Peoples in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. We encourage its inclusion in all CBD processes, including the new Article 8j Subsidiary body, as well as in other international process where the rights of Indigenous Peoples could be impacted. In particular, we reject the imposition of so called “protected areas” being carried out in the name of biodiversity conservation under the CBD’s “30 x 30” program, which is causing forced relocations, militarization, violence and denial of access to food and water sources for Indigenous Peoples around the world, the real protectors of the world’s biodiversity.

We call on the Joint Meeting on Pesticides Management (JMPPM) and its coordinators, the World Health Organization and UN Food and Agriculture Organization, to implement the UN Committee on Agriculture’s October 2024 decision to amend the International Code of Conduct on Pesticides Management to include the rights of Indigenous Peoples, with our full and effective participation.

We commit with one voice to protect, recover, and decolonize our teachings and true histories, rematriate and protect our original seeds and seed health, reject the genetic modification of seeds, and challenge false market-based solutions to the climate crisis. We commit to restore and protect our ancestral food production practices and methods for the survival of our future generations. We also commit to restore the original relationships of knowledge, seed exchange and trade that existed between and among our Peoples before the arrival of the colonizers to ensure the resiliency of our biodiversity and enhance our ability to adapt to the impacts of climate change. We also commit to work together to build a social and solidarity economy and fair markets, including among each other, to ensure that Indigenous agriculture and food production can provide sustainable livelihoods for our Peoples and especially for our youth as the next generation of farmers.

We recognize the negative impacts of industrial food production and specifically industrial agriculture that contribute dramatically to the climate crisis, producing 25% of the world’s greenhouse gases. In addition, it promotes mono-cropping that undermines seed biodiversity and uses high levels of agro-chemicals that destroy soil life and health. It also causes deforestation, overgrazing and unsustainable water use. We affirm the position of the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change that has called for “the protection and restitution of agro-ecology based on Indigenous Peoples’ ancestral practices, as an essential component of “Just Transition”.

We insist and reaffirm that recognition and respect for our traditional land rights and collective land

tenure systems is an essential foundation of our ability to protect natural biodiversity and continue our Indigenous food systems. Without recognition, respect and implementation of our rights to our lands, territories and waters, there can be no food sovereignty. In this regard, we express our firm support for the full recognition and protection of the collective land rights of the Maya Peoples of Belize, including the good faith implementation of the 2015 Caribbean Court of Justice decision affirming Maya land rights in Southern Belize.

In this Conference we built upon the firm foundation set down for us by the 1st, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> International Indigenous Peoples Corn Conferences held in Santo Domingo Tomaltepec and Juchitan, Oaxaca; Okemah, Oklahoma; Tecpan, Guatemala; Vicente Guerrero, Tlaxcala, Mexico; and lastly in Shiprock, New Mexico on the Diné Reservation. We endorse and support the Declarations from those conferences as the basis and inspiration for our work at this gathering and going forward.

We also endorse Declarations adopted in other recent Indigenous Peoples gatherings that have had a direct impact on the struggles and solutions we have discussed during this Conference. These include in particular the “Principles and Protocols for Just Transition” from the Indigenous Peoples’ Just Transition Summit (October 2024) and the 4<sup>th</sup> International Indigenous Women’s Symposium on Environmental Violence (January 2025).

We also commit to providing provide mutual support to one another as we defend our rights to lands and territories, waters, intergenerational health, cultural heritage, FPIC 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 defend our lands, territories and ways of life in the face of the climate crisis caused by ongoing, unabating corporate and government addiction to fossil fuels, and the extraction of minerals, water, and other vital resources from Indigenous lands and territories.

We affirm that our knowledge is intergenerational and held collectively. It cannot be patented or owned by other entities. We call for respect for this principle by academic and scientific communities, corporations, States, and UN bodies. We affirm that our seeds, plants, and animals are sacred and must not be subject to genetic modification, commodification or patenting by corporations or governments under any circumstances. We 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, Nation to Nation Treaties with Indigenous Peoples and other international standards that recognize and respect our rights.

We will continue to oppose projects for mining of “transition minerals” and uranium carried out in the lands of Indigenous Peoples without our consent in the name of climate mitigation and to insist that “just transition” policies be carried out with full respect for our inherent rights as affirmed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of indigenous Peoples, including to FPIC . We demand that States uphold their commitment to the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change to ensure that the rise in global temperature be kept to no more than 1.5 degrees centigrade. This requires true Just Transition starting with a rapid phase out of fossil fuel-based energy production.

We recognize and honor the vital role of our traditional knowledge holders, spiritual and cultural leaders, healers, farmers and other practitioners who continue to protect and preserve our ways of

knowing and healing, sometimes in the face of severe repression and criminalization. We also give thanks for our elders who have the living memory of planting and growing without chemicals and genetically modified seeds. We encourage our Peoples to declare our traditional territories as “Food Sovereignty Zones” free from extractive industries, agro-chemicals and the genetic modification of seeds.

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 commit to oppose all forms of environmental racism and environmental violence. These include international trafficking of banned and highly hazardous pesticides, appropriation of our lands, territories and waters by commercial interests and corporations, industrial agriculture, monocultivation, invasive species, and extractive industries such as mining, fracking, drilling and pipelines. We commit to call attention to the links between extractive industries and sexual violence and trafficking of Indigenous women, girls and others carried out in conjunction with these activities. We also continue to demand protection for Indigenous rights defenders who are standing against imposed development that threatens their homelands, waters and ways of life and are facing criminalization, imprisonment, repression and assassination.

We came together in the beautiful land of the Maya in Belize to renew our sacred obligations, relationships and responsibilities to defend our corn, original seeds, lands and territories, waters, food producing places, plant medicines and traditional lifeways, as well as the natural balance of the climate, the masculine and feminine elements, and the vitality of the natural world in all its manifestations.

We will continue to build our unity, 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. Our ancestral memories, histories and values, ceremonies and practices must be kept alive, and our inherent rights must be defended. We have made these collective commitments and calls to action in the spirit of unity and in recognition of our sacred responsibilities to the Natural World. We will plant our corn, protect our ecosystems and Earth Mother, and continue our own ways of living, being and knowing. If we continue to stand together, our children and our future generations will survive as who we are.

***Adopted by consensus on May 11, 2025***