

INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S ROUNDTABLE ON MERCURY, MARCH 27-28, 2023

Organized and hosted by the International Indian Treaty Council

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS IN SUPPORT OF ONGOING WORK AND NEXT STEPS

Indigenous Women from North, Central, South America, Arctic and the Pacific gathered at Nisenan and Miwuk Indigenous territories (Lincoln, California), and also participated virtually to share the causes of mercury contamination, other heavy metals and environmental toxics in our territories, including the cumulative impacts on our traditional food and eco-systems, cultural and spiritual lifeways, community and intergenerational health, and the development and well-being of our babies and children. We also shared strategies for advancing responses and solutions on all levels. We agreed on the following recommendations in order to support and continue this important work:

1. We affirm the connection between the health of Indigenous women's bodies and the health of the land as life givers and life bearers, and recognize the shared impacts of environmental violence and the toxic contamination impacting our sacred lifecycles.
2. We affirm the importance of data sovereignty. We recommend that we carry out our own community-based participatory research, testing, mapping and data collection regarding the contamination of our lands, waters, food sources and community members, although we also recognize the challenges of funding, training, reliable testing facilities and cultural protocols that need to be addressed in this process.
3. We reject the "acceptable risk" framework and challenge that the burden of proof falls on Indigenous Peoples to demonstrate or prove that our health impacts are a direct result of the toxic contamination produced by corporate and government activities when there is already sufficient information, data, and lived experiences proving these linkages.
4. We recognize the importance of community education about the sources and impacts of mercury as well as the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples, including those affirmed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Nation to Nation Treaties, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international standards and agreements as the basis for Free Prior and Informed Consent and full participation in decision-making.
5. We recognize and support the rights of sovereign traditional Indigenous governance structures to decide on matters to protect their traditional territories based on the inherent right to self-determination.
6. We call for strengthened education and advocacy campaigns focused on policy-makers at all levels, beginning with our own tribal leaders, to promote real cleanup of contaminated sites including abandoned gold and mercury mines and halt all mercury-producing activities including legal and illegal gold mining, coal fired power plants, as well as industrial, medical, dental and commercial uses. We also call for government and corporate accountability to address the health and environmental impacts of mercury contamination that they have caused or allowed, in conjunction with the impacted Indigenous Peoples.

7. We commit to continuing to document our community health impacts including by collecting testimonies from Indigenous community members and reaching out to health workers, midwives, healers, educators and child advocates to obtain additional relevant information.
8. We recognize the need to increase our participation at the international level including through robust participation in the United Nations Minamata Convention to make our voices heard and hold governments accountable for their commitments to source reduction and clean up and to challenge their complicity in the exposures impacting our territories and community health.
9. We affirm the need to recognize, support, uplift and advance the leadership, knowledge and lived experiences of Indigenous women in this work, and to combat colonization in all its forms as a primary driver of environmental violence impacting Indigenous women, girls and coming generations. We reaffirm the call for zero tolerance of sexual violence carried out against Indigenous women and children in relation to extractive industries in our territories.
10. We recognize that mercury contamination combines with other types of toxic exposures in our environments and bodies and the cumulative impacts must be considered when assessing “acceptable” levels of exposure. We also affirm the need to challenge proposed false solutions to climate change as additional drivers of contamination including through the mining and processing of lithium and uranium.
11. We recognize the urgent need to address the role of military activity, in particular the activities of the United States military around the world as a major contributor to the release of a range of contaminants impacting Indigenous Peoples’ territories and health, including mercury.
12. We affirm the need to continue working together, supporting each other, providing healing and comfort, sharing information and developing effective strategies including through list serves, social media, joint campaigns, urgent actions, and ongoing in-person gatherings.
13. We recognize that this necessary work must be properly resourced and sustained in a way that safeguards the cultural protocols and intergenerational transference of knowledge for our next generation of environmental defenders.

Agreed by consensus of the participants on March 28th, 2023