



International Indian Treaty Council
Consejo Internacional de Tratados Indios

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Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food Michael Fakhri by the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) in preparation for the United Nations Food Systems Summit, June 30, 2021

“The health and survival of our corn mother/father in all its natural varieties, colors and original strength and resilience cannot be separated from the health and survival of our Peoples. Our struggles to protect corn as a source of our lives cannot be separated from our struggles to defend our rights to land, water, traditional knowledge and self-determination”.

-- From THE DECLARATION OF SANTO DOMINGO TOMALTEPEC adopted by representatives of 48 Indigenous Nations and Peoples at the First International Indigenous Peoples Corn Conference, Oaxaca Mexico, September 30th, 2012

Indigenous Peoples have long affirmed that Food Sovereignty, based on the full exercise of their rights as well as the protection and practice of their traditional cultures and knowledge systems, is a prerequisite for their Food Security. **The Declaration of Atilán** adopted by consensus at the first Indigenous Peoples’ Global Consultation on the Right to Food, co-sponsored by the IITC and UN FAO, April 17 - 19, 2002, affirmed that *“the content of the Right to Food of Indigenous Peoples is a collective right based on our special spiritual relationship with Mother Earth, our lands and territories, environment, and natural resources that provide our traditional nutrition;... emphasizing that the denial of the Right to Food for Indigenous Peoples not only denies us our physical survival, but also denies us our social organization, our cultures, traditions, languages, spirituality, sovereignty, and total identity; it is a denial of our collective Indigenous existence”.*

The lack of a clear mechanism for Indigenous Peoples, especially Indigenous traditional food producers, to have input into the organizing process of the UN Food Systems Summit to ensure that its outcomes will support the resiliency and sustainability of their Food Systems and ways of life has been a major concern expressed by IITC and other Indigenous organizations. In addition, IITC has joined a number of other organizations, coalitions, human rights and food sovereignty advocates in expressing concerns regarding what has been termed the “corporate capture” of UN Food Systems bodies and processes including the UN Food Systems Summit, as evidenced by the formal role of the World Economic Forum in the Summit and a recent partnership agreement between FAO and CROPLIFE which represents multi-national agrochemical companies.

For these reasons, when IITC was requested by some of the Summit organizers to consider ways to directly engage Indigenous traditional food producers from around the world in providing independent input into the Summit’s outcomes, IITC agreed to organize a global consultation so that their views could be heard in this process. This Consultation, *“Ensuring the Resiliency of Indigenous Peoples Food Systems”* was intended to ensure that the Summit’s outcomes and final commitments will include recommendations from Indigenous food producers, practitioners and knowledge holders including men, women, youth and elders from farming, fishing, pastoralist, gathering, herding, and hunting Food Systems. The actual impacts of their contributions in the Food Systems Summit’s final outcomes and commitments are yet to be seen.

From 2002 through 2021, IITC co-organized over 25 International, regional, and local Food Sovereignty gatherings attended by Indigenous food producers and knowledge-holders from North, Central and South America, the Arctic, Caribbean and Pacific regions. Outcome documents or Declarations were adopted by consensus of the participants at most of these gatherings which have included the participation, in total, of several thousand Indigenous food producers and food sovereignty activists. These collective statements highlighted the importance of several overarching, foundational and cross-cutting themes and affirmed a rights-based approach. They provided the basis for development of 5 interlinked proposed commitments for the UNFSS to ensure the protection, sustainability and resilience of Indigenous food systems. These were affirmed by the participants in the Global Consultation as follows:

Commitments for States and the UN System:

1. States and the UN System will commit to **respect, uphold and fully implement the recognized rights of Indigenous Peoples required for the resilience of their food systems**, including their rights to lands, territories and resources, health, FPIC, subsistence, cultural heritage and self-determination.
2. States and the UN system will commit **to ensure the protection, health and restoration as required of the natural environments, territories, ecosystems, animal and plant food sources, and bio-diversity** that are vital to the resilience of their Food Systems.
3. States and the UN System will commit **to support and implement Indigenous Peoples' self-defined responses for mediating and preventing crisis situations** impacting their traditional livelihoods and food systems, including climate change, natural disasters, military conflicts, and pandemics.
4. States and the UN system will commit to implement effective measures, standards, and policies developed in conjunction with Indigenous Peoples to **protect and safeguard Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge, Ways of Knowing, Traditional Cultures and Food-related Practices**.

Commitment by Indigenous Peoples

5. Indigenous Peoples will commit to prioritize **inter-generational knowledge-sharing** and will strengthen the participation by children and youth in all aspects of our Food Systems to ensure long term sustainability and resiliency.

The Indigenous Peoples Global Consultation was conducted in two parts, with interpretation and translation provided to participants in English, Spanish, French, Russian and Portuguese. Participants were from all 7 Indigenous regions representing a wide range of Indigenous food system practitioners (Farmers, herders, hunters, fishers and gatherers). A virtual consultation via zoom took place for 3 ½ hours on May 29th – 30th (depending on respective time zones) with framing presentations for each proposed commitment and breakout sessions in each language. Responses to the on-line survey addressing issues pertaining to the 5 Commitment areas were received from May 22nd to June 21st. 118 separate responses were received from 28 countries with reported representation of 3,648,663 individuals from 134 distinct Indigenous Peoples and Nations. 75% of the respondents reported that they are Indigenous food producers.

Addressing specific responses pertaining to Commitment # 1 focusing on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, which is the subject of this survey, 78% of the respondents reported that their food systems and food related practices have been impacted by human rights violations.

Participants in both the zoom consultation and the on-line survey underscored the essential importance of many of the rights affirmed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to ensure the full exercise of their right to Food and the resilience of their food systems. These include, *inter alia*, rights to lands, water, and other resources; right to cultural heritage including seeds; rights to the productive capacity of their environments; free prior and informed consent regarding legislative actions, use of hazardous materials and development; rights of free movement by Indigenous Peoples divided by colonial borders; right to health; and rights affirmed in Treaties and agreements. These essential rights were emphasized in both the zoom consultation and the questionnaire responses.

Specific rights violations impacting the resiliency of Indigenous Food Systems that were cited most frequently by participants in both the zoom consultation and the on-line survey responses included: the imposition of Genetically-modified seeds, “bio-piracy” and the application of high levels of toxic pesticides by industrial agriculture and multinational corporations; ongoing impacts of colonization; violation of Treaties including the Treaty right to food; lack of protection for Indigenous land tenure and traditional processes such as rotational farming; creation of “protected areas” restricting or prohibiting traditional food related practices; state-permitted (or sponsored) incursions into Indigenous territories by developers (mining, forestry, agri-business, large-scale commercial fishing, etc.); environmental contamination of habitats and food-producing lands and waters by extractive industries, urban pollution and other polluters; States that still do not recognize Indigenous Peoples, their lands and rights; gender discrimination; and severe and increasing impacts of climate change.

Several participants also attributed the increased vulnerabilities of Indigenous Peoples to the COVID-19 pandemic to deteriorating health conditions in their communities caused by ongoing and increasing lack of access to traditional, healthy, self-produced foods, as well as governments’ failure to incorporate Indigenous-generated solutions and responses into official policies and programs to address the pandemic. Participants also continued to raise their concerns about the influence and direct involvement of corporations in the UN Food Systems Summit and UN Food-related bodies, as they consistently identified corporate activity in and around their territories as one of the most constant threats to their food sovereignty and the resiliency of their traditional food systems.

A comprehensive written report on the outcomes of the Indigenous Peoples’ Global Consultation and on-line Survey will be provided to the Summit organizers and can be provided to the Special Rapporteur upon request. A PowerPoint providing additional analysis of the compiled survey responses will be presented at the UNFSS Pre-Summit in-person in Rome, and virtually from July 26-28, 2021 and can be provided upon request. For more information please contact IITC’s Executive Director Andrea Carmen at andrea@treatycouncil.org or via telephone, +520 273-6003.

cc: Francisco Cali Tzay, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
cc: Myrna Cunningham, Indigenous UN Food Systems Summit Advisory Committee member
cc: Participants in the Indigenous Peoples Global Consultation for the UN Food Systems Summit