

International Indian Treaty Council

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The US Election and the Inherent Rights of Indigenous Peoples

**Statement by IITC Executive Director Andrea Carmen,
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Today is a day of sober reckoning for Indigenous Peoples, human rights and earth defenders, and allies in the United States and around the world. As a multi-regional Indigenous organization representing Nations, Peoples and governments which pre-date current nation-States and their electoral systems, IITC does not usually make statements about such outcomes.

However, yesterday's election will have wide-reaching impacts in and outside of the US for Indigenous Peoples who are working internationally and in their communities to protect their sacred sites, ecosystems, cultures and Treaty rights from imposed development. US president-elect Donald Trump has committed to withdraw the US from the UN Climate Change talks and the Paris Agreement and to push for expanded fossil fuel extraction. As an investor in that corporation, he has called for the DAPL pipeline construction to push ahead despite the opposition of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. He has said he will reinstate torture, impose religious criteria for immigration, build a border wall dividing our traditional homelands, and carry out mass deportations. We can only imagine the potential impacts on US' obligations to uphold the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Nation-to-Nation Treaties and International human rights Conventions.

The press as well as Donald Trump's supporters have compared him to former US President Andrew Jackson and his so-called "populist" appeal. However, many Indian Nations remember Andrew Jackson as one of the most infamous "ethnic cleansers" the US has ever produced. Jackson was responsible for the Indian Removal Act of 1830 which produced the "Trail of Tears", and the forced removal of the Cherokee, Seminole, Muscogee, Chickasaw and Choctaw from their traditional homelands. The resulting deaths and suffering is well remembered, and the scars persist to this day. Trump himself has praised Jackson's role in US history.

Of course, Indigenous Peoples, along with many others in the US and around the world, have profound concerns about what has happened. It is clearly time for increased vigilance and renewed commitment to defend what is important and sacred to us. It is also time to recall that the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and human rights are inherent and inalienable. They were given to us by the Creator. Our rights can either be violated or upheld; but they can't be given or taken away by any election, politician or law.

In the upcoming years, we will no doubt be under great pressure to defend our rights, sacred lands and waters, Treaty rights, ways of life. We will need to be unified and prepared to stand in solidarity with one another with the clarity and positivity that only our spiritual teachings and practices can provide. Our ancestors withstood far more with great courage, wisdom and integrity, always keeping true to who they were. Now is not the time for us to be discouraged, depressed or fearful. There is far too much at stake for that.