

# DECLARATION OF ATITLÁN, GUATEMALA

*Indigenous Peoples' Consultation on the Right to Food:  
A Global Consultation  
Atitlán, Sololá, Guatemala, April 17 - 19, 2002*

We, representatives and traditional authorities of Indigenous Peoples, Nations, and organizations from 28 countries, gathered from all regions of the world, including farmers, hunters, gatherers, fishers, herders, and pastoralists, met in Panajachel, Sololá, at Lake Atitlán, Guatemala, with the following objectives:

1. To learn about the hardships faced by Indigenous Peoples in food-related matters.
2. To define common elements among Indigenous Peoples:
  - To propose them to the States so that the States will implement the Right to Food in accordance with the aspirations of Indigenous Peoples; and,
  - To strengthen ties of cooperation among Indigenous Peoples.
3. To formulate a strategy based on the vision of Indigenous Peoples, with the objective of making proposals to the States and to the international community in order to overcome hardships in matters of Food Security and Food Sovereignty.

We extend our deep appreciation to the Indigenous Peoples of Guatemala, particularly the Maya Kaqchikel People for their hospitality and generosity in hosting the various delegations attending this consultation.

We are aware that in Guatemala, a situation exists of misery, extreme poverty, and death by starvation, day by day, of men, women, and children. This is reflected in the report from the First Indigenous Peoples' National Conference on the Right to Food, held on April 5, 2002, in Guatemala City, which includes the following facts: that in a period of 2 weeks 41 persons died of starvation; that in 44% of Guatemala's territory, people are living in extreme poverty and at high risk of death from starvation; the following Departments of Guatemala are listed in order of their degree of extreme poverty: San Marcos 86.66%, Totonicapán 85.62%, Quiché 86.66%, Huehuetenango 77.85%, Alta Verapaz 76.40%, Sololá 76.36%, Jalapa 72.59%, Jutiapa 63.88%; Santa Rosa 62.07%, and Quetzaltenango 60.67%.

We find the above-described situation to be troubling and, indeed, deplorable as it reflects the reality of many Indigenous Peoples worldwide, and a risk exists that many others could face the same problem.

We recognize that as Indigenous Peoples, we face a higher risk of suffering the consequences of Food Insecurity. We underscore, for example, that the World Bank in its study on "Indigenous Peoples and Poverty," identifies our Peoples as the poorest of the poor.

The diverse Indigenous Peoples participating in this International Consultation have exchanged points of view, experiences and realities, and are alarmed by the growing food insecurity, starvation and malnutrition, which is a collective reality faced by our Peoples.

## **DECLARATION:**

*IN AGREEMENT* 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; *underscoring* that the means of subsistence of Indigenous Peoples nourishes our cultures, languages, social life, worldview, and especially our relationship with Mother Earth; *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,

*TAKING INTO ACCOUNT* that the right to development is a collective right of Peoples as well as of individuals, and that the Right to Food forms a part of the development process, creating conditions for the enjoyment of all human rights, fundamental freedoms and well-being,

*REMINDED* that the Plan of Action and the Declaration of the World Food Summit (1996) stated that Food Security means "the access of all people to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life,"

*REMINDED* that Food Sovereignty is the right of Peoples to define their own policies and strategies for the sustainable production, distribution, and consumption of food, with respect for their own cultures and their own systems of managing natural resources and rural areas, and is considered to be a precondition for Food Security,

*CONSIDERING* that Article 5 of the Declaration on the Right to Development (1986) states that "the refusal to recognize the fundamental right of Peoples to self-determination," as a fundamental injustice against which the States should take resolute steps,

*KEEPING IN MIND* that Article 1 in Common of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights recognizes that **all** peoples, by virtue of the right to Self-Determination, may establish and implement their own economic, social, and cultural development, and their own development strategies, based on their own vision, and that "in no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence,"

*RECOGNIZING* that for Indigenous Peoples, the rights to land, water, and territory, as well as the right to self-determination, are essential for the full realization of our Food Security and Food Sovereignty,

*NOTING* that the States parties to the First World Food Summit, in its Declaration and Plan of Action, Commitment I, Objective 1.1 (d) made a commitment to recognize and support

Indigenous Peoples and their communities in their pursuit of economic and social development, with full respect for their identity, traditions, forms of social organization and cultural values; *also noting* that the States parties made a commitment to reduce by one half the total number of human beings suffering from hunger and malnutrition by the year 2015, *we regret* that for Indigenous Peoples hunger and malnutrition have not been sufficiently reduced, and that suffering from starvation and malnutrition is increasing,

Having consulted and analyzed the situation faced by Indigenous Peoples from various parts of the world with respect to Food Security, Food Sovereignty and other aspects related to the life and the development of Indigenous Peoples, we identified the following obstacles to our Food Security and Food Sovereignty:

#### **OBSTACLES TO OUR FOOD SECURITY AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY:**

1. The implementation and domination of globalization and free trade, which act without limits nor morality in the theft of our lands, territories, and other resources necessary for our Food Security and Food Sovereignty;
2. The imposition of industrial models by the governments, particularly in the form of industrialized mono-agriculture, that causes an erosion of genetic diversity and the resulting loss of our seeds, species and breeds of animals. This only impoverishes our lands, generating a growing emigration of members of our communities to urban areas in search of employment that does not exist. In addition, the adoption of alien market systems imposes foods on us that do not nourish, but instead cause diseases and problems of all sorts for our health and problems in the physical development of our children;
3. The extension of intellectual property rights in favor of multinational corporations that has increased bio-piracy and the illicit appropriation of our biological diversity and traditional knowledge; and the introduction of genetically altered food, which is causing the loss of our traditional foods, of our health, of our relationship with Mother Earth, of our traditional plants and medicines, and of our very cultures;
4. The growing imposition of the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers that poison Mother Earth, the communities that work The Earth, and the food resources on which Indigenous Peoples depend worldwide, affecting food production and hence nutrition and health, and increasing morbidity and mortality rates, in particular for our women and children;
5. The imposition of unsustainable projects by governments and private companies in our territories without consultation or prior informed consent, and without taking into account the rights and values of the Indigenous Peoples affected;
6. The policies and demands of international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and their structural adjustment programs;

7. Militarization and repression in Indigenous territories, in particular Plan Colombia and the fumigation of indigenous crops that is now expanding as policy into other countries of the region;
8. National policies that impose inadequate and exclusionary models and practices, which in turn result in the loss of our lands, territories and collective indigenous identity, generating increased food insecurity;

We therefore **RESOLVE:**

On the international level:

1. TO CALL for the immediate adoption of the original text of the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, currently being discussed at the United Nations.
2. TO CALL on all States to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of Persistent Organic Pollutants and the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change.
3. TO CALL upon States to ratify and implement ILO Convention 169, despite its limitations, as a step towards the full recognition of the rights of Indigenous Peoples.
4. TO RECOMMEND to the World Food Summit: five years later, to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to the Pan-American Seed Seminar, and to other upcoming conferences on genetically modified organisms, that full recognition must be given to the rights of Indigenous Peoples to Food Security and Food Sovereignty, and that the obstacles limiting access to the necessary resources for our existence as Peoples must be eliminated.
5. TO RECOMMEND that the World Food Summit: 5 Years Later, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and the States parties insist that international trade and financing entities recognize, respect, and observe human, economic, social, and cultural rights, particularly the rights of Indigenous Peoples.
6. TO RECOMMEND that the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the States parties prioritize as fundamental the Rights to Food, Health, and Education, from the perspective of the values and worldviews of the Indigenous Peoples, in the development process.
7. TO RECOMMEND that the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO):
  - a. Support the campaigns carried out by Indigenous Peoples to inform our communities regarding our Right to Food, our Right to Development, and our Social, Cultural, Economic, and Political Rights;

- b. Support our own systems and networks designed to improve the dissemination of the results of our research and existing information on the impacts of toxics, chemicals, genetic engineering, etc.;
  - c. Regularly inform Indigenous Peoples' organizations and traditional authorities involved in the issue of food in all countries, utilizing the media that are most accessible to all the communities in appropriate languages.
8. TO RECOMMEND that the FAO establish an open-ended working group so that Indigenous Peoples may consult in the development and implementation of policies that affect Food Security and Food Sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples.
  9. TO DEMAND the elimination of development policies imposed by States that run counter to the life and to the philosophy, worldviews, principles, and inherent rights of the collectivities of Indigenous Peoples in the different regions of the world.
  10. TO DEMAND that water not be privatized, as it is a sacred element for Indigenous Peoples, essential to our agriculture and to the maintenance of our Food Security and Food Sovereignty.
  11. TO DEMAND an end to the policies of theft and usurpation of our lands, territories and natural resources, which are necessary for the enjoyment of our right to adequate nutrition. We also demand an end to the accelerated destruction of the environment.
  12. TO DEMAND an end to the appropriation of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge, practices, and innovations as well as the appropriation of our genetic resources. We demand furthermore, a prohibition against the patenting of all forms of life and a prohibition against perverse technologies such as "Terminator" technology.
  13. TO DEMAND that governments and multinational corporations inform Indigenous Peoples, in a full, truthful and comprehensible manner, and in the appropriate languages, regarding the production, use, transport, and exportation of pollutants that affect the food systems, environment and health of Indigenous Peoples.
  14. TO DEMAND that the governments prohibit the production and application of pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and other substances considered dangerous for human health, particularly those that are already banned in other countries.
  15. TO DEMAND the full participation of Indigenous Peoples in the development of mechanisms for equitable land distribution, land tenure, and control over the natural resources necessary for our Food Security and Food Sovereignty, without putting at risk the ownership of land and other resources held by Indigenous Peoples.
  16. TO DEMAND that the laws, institutions and public policies of the States recognize and support Indigenous Peoples' systems in agricultural production, fishing, hunting, gathering, herding, pastoral practices (herders), as well as our own economic and political practices.

17. TO DEMAND that the protection of traditional knowledge be carried out in accordance with the worldviews, values, needs and traditional legal systems of Indigenous Peoples.
18. TO DEMAND respect for the spirituality and traditional religions of Indigenous Peoples as an essential part of the development and exercise of our rights, particularly the ceremonial practices related to our knowledge regarding crops, production, Food Security and Food Sovereignty.

## **WE COMMIT:**

### On a local/community level:

1. To revitalize the Worldviews of Indigenous Peoples.
2. To initiate a process of de-colonization within our communities, which includes culturally relevant education.
3. To strengthen our traditional food production systems, and family and community economies.
4. To provide families and communities with information regarding the benefits of consuming traditional foods.
5. To provide information regarding the health risks associated with consuming alien or non-traditional foods, including foods produced with chemicals and genetically modified food products.

### On a National and Regional Level:

1. To create networks for communication, information, capacity building, and coordination among Indigenous Peoples regarding Food Security and Food Sovereignty.
2. To strengthen cooperation and solidarity on national and regional levels to fortify political, cultural, social, and economic ties and unity among Indigenous Peoples and Nations.
3. To create networks of solidarity among producers and consumers of traditional products.
4. To pursue constructive ties with Civil Society.
5. To create our own development programs in order to achieve Self Determination for our peoples and avoid the dependencies imposed by international financial institutions such as the IDB, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank, among others.

6. To promote autonomous Indigenous processes directed toward the development of systems for the protection of the practice of our knowledge and innovations that reflect our values, priorities, needs, and worldviews.
7. To make the issues of Food Security and Food Sovereignty known at national and international levels through nationally and regionally organized and representative processes, so as to address these issues based on Indigenous Peoples own forms of thinking, feeling, and acting.
8. To disseminate the results of this consultation and the Declaration of Atitlán at the World Summits, and to other international, national and regional agencies and mechanisms, as well as to our own communities, organizations, Indigenous Peoples and to Civil Society.
9. To develop an Indigenous Peoples' Comprehensive Plan of Action regarding Food Security and Food Sovereignty.

### **Conclusion:**

The participants in this Consultation REQUEST that the International Indian Treaty Council, IITC, establish and coordinate a mechanism for the dissemination of information and other aspects of follow-up for the recommendations and decisions of this Consultation.

WE REQUEST THAT the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues accept this Declaration and propose to the World Summits and agencies of the United Nations System that they incorporate it into their respective plans of action and policies.

Iximulew, job' Imox, Oxi' Kej<sup>1</sup>  
Panajachel, Sololá, Guatemala, April 19, 2002.

*For more information, please contact the International Indian Treaty Council*  
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<sup>1</sup> Ixim Ulew in the Maya Kaqchikel language means Solid Earth, granulated Earth, the Earth of the Jungles and of trees that resemble corn. Job' in the K'iche language means five; Imox, is a day on the Sacred Mayan calendar. This day addresses the qualities of instability, surprise, irrationality, and creation in emotion.