



**THE CONVENING OF  
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES  
FOR THE HEALING OF  
MOTHER EARTH**

**March 10-13, 2008**

**Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico**

**MEETING SUMMARY**

*June, 2008*

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## Convening Agenda

### Day 1 – March 10, 2008

5:00	Buses From Hotel to Palenque Archeological Site
6:15	Mayan Sunrise Ceremony
8:00	Breakfast (to be served at Palenque Archeological Site)
8:30	Healing / Spiritual Ceremonies at Palenque Archeological Site
11:00	Guided Tour of Palenque Archeological Site
12:30	Buses to Conference Centre
1:00	Lunch (Served at the Conference Centre)
2:30	Official opening of the conference (Tribal Leaders, Government representatives)

### Day 2 – March 11, 2008

9:00	Opening Prayer
9:15	Setting the Context of the Assembly, setting rules (Elmer Courchene)
9:30	Honoring Water (Presentation)
9:50	Open Discussion
1:00	Lunch
2:00	Honoring Air (Presentation)
2:20	Open Discussion Continued
6:00	Canadian Cultural Event

### Day 3 – March 12, 2008

9:00	Opening Prayer
9:15	Summary of Previous Discussion
9:30	Honoring Earth (Presentation)
9:50	Open Discussion
1:00	Lunch
2:00	Honoring Earth (Presentation)
2:20	Open Discussion Continued
6:00	United States Cultural Event

### Day 4 – March 13, 2008

9:00	Opening Prayer
9:15	Summary of Previous Discussion
9:30	Honoring Fire (Presentation)
9:50	Open Discussion
1:00	Lunch
2:00	Honoring the Lifegivers (Presentation on Long Term Survival)
2:20	Review of the Palenque Charter
6:00	Mexican Cultural Event

## **Mayan Sunrise Ceremony**

Delegations from Canada, the United States and Mexico gathered at the Palenque Archeological site for a Mayan Sunrise Ceremony to open the Convening (Attachment 1). Elders from each delegation came forward to participate in a traditional sunrise prayer and ceremony.

## **Opening Ceremony**

At the Opening Ceremony delegates from Canada, the US and Mexico welcomed the participants and gave their hopes for the Convening. Presentations were made by Juan Sánchez Jiménez, Mexico, Elin Miller, United States (Attachment 2), Debra Harry, United States/Northern Paiute of Nevada, and Yvonne Moorhouse for the Inuit delegation. Carol Jorgensen, Director of US Environmental Protection Agency's American Indian Environmental Office, spoke on behalf of her office and for event co-creator Roy Kwiatkowski from Health Canada.

## **Convening Summary**

This summary is meant to capture overall themes, issues and ideas that were discussed and the proposals that were generated. It is not intended to capture individual voices, although some comments may be included in order to accurately state the themes. Multi-day discussions are grouped together to show related themes and outcomes. A more complete summary of each day's discussion is available upon request.

Moderation of the three day Convening was rotated amongst the three countries in attendance starting with Mexico. Early the first day, Larry Mercurieff, United States/Aleut of Alaska, explained the symbolism of the meeting room's concentric circle seating arrangement. The circular seating allows all to sit as equals, with no one representing less. It also represents the Cosmic Womb – the birth of all things. He noted that the circle is a feminine form and an important element for the Convening, symbolizing the restoration of feminine balance to Mother Earth. Elders were seated in the innermost circle and delegates were seated in concentric circles. Elders spoke first and then other delegates were invited to join in with their comments.

### **Original Teachings and Spirituality**

The indigenous spiritual connection to the earth was the foundation for much discussion throughout the Convening. Elder speakers and other delegates spoke of the need for communities to return to traditional values and the original teachings, emphasizing the spirituality that is integral to their way of life. This spirituality is fundamental to their message. Delegates felt that any action or message must reflect the spiritual values that are part of their tradition. Many noted that spiritual disconnectedness is at the heart of illness within families and communities. A return to spiritual connectedness will foster the values necessary for community health and, in turn, environmental health. As part of

the concern for the health of families and communities, participants spoke about the need to safeguard their children and future generations to come from current threats, respecting the prior and future seven generations.

Analogous to the spiritual link with the earth, delegates expressed the importance of their own connection to each other. As a united group, with a united cause, indigenous peoples have more strength and more influence. By sharing stories and ideas, they are better informed and better equipped to have their message heard.

### **Feminine Perspective**

An important aspect of the Convening was honoring the feminine perspective. It was important to hear from women about their perspective on issues of value and meaning since many environmental impacts are felt most profoundly by women as the child bearers and caretakers. Many speakers expressed the need for women to recognize the vital role they play in the health of their families, communities and the earth and to exercise their voice and power in affecting change. Convening participants honored the women who have made great strides in bringing awareness to important indigenous issues.

### **Environmental Impacts**

Throughout the Convening, delegates and speakers pointed to their own observations of environmental illness within their communities. Central to the discussion were the observations from those that see and feel impacts firsthand.

### **Water**

For many communities, water, both in liquid and ice form, is essential to survival as well as a principal indicator of current environmental ills. The following are some of the problems noted regarding water:

- Many communities are surrounded by water and their health depends on the health of fisheries and other marine species.
- Because of dams, rivers have been diverted and hydrological highways (traditional navigational routes) bisected.
- Dams have caused flooding.
- Construction causes sedimentation and the erosion of banks.
- In northern regions, ice is receding or not solid and cannot be crossed by people and animals, directly affecting traditional hunting or fishing grounds.
- There is concern about loss of species and biodiversity.
- Industrial pollution exists.
- There is pollution from household waste.
- Increased development increases problems associated with construction.
- Water is being sold; there is great concern about the privatization of resources.

- In Hawaii, they have an expansive water table. Oceans are now rising into homes. Traditional taro cannot be grown; salinity is entering the water table. The tourist industry has an impact as do military operations.
- Aquifers are draining.
- There is pollution caused from mining.

### ***Air***

- There is airborne and cloud-borne pollution.
- Pollution is recent and is caused by industry and garbage.
- Mexico City – there is a need to discuss large cities.
  - In large cities, there is pollution from car exhaust.
- There is damage from free radical pollutants, causing an actual change in molecularization.
- Injury takes only a moment, but has a lasting effect.

### ***Earth***

- Recycling is not being done enough; the old ways are changing – women used to carry their own bags, now they buy plastic ones that are then collected.
- Mining causes extensive damage and pollution.
- In Mexico (Tabasco), cattle-breeding activities are extensive and causing a loss of vegetation.

### ***Health***

- Threats to indigenous health:
  - Traditional foods are not as abundant.
  - Changes in climate cause changes to species habitat and affect the availability of food.
  - There has been a change in diet to overly-processed and foods high in sugar. This can lead to heart disease, cancer, and diabetes.
  - These threats can be attributed to the lack of health of Mother Earth.

### **Self Determination - Sovereignty**

The issue of self determination and the recognition of indigenous rights is core to the purpose of this Convening. Delegates pointed to current and past legislative agreements made during which they were not consulted. In order for balanced representation, indigenous peoples must have a place at the table. These inherent rights must be affirmed and insisted upon rather than waiting for outside action.

As part of that affirmation, delegates stressed the need for indigenous peoples to take responsibility for their own actions first. They acknowledged the tension between traditional practices and contradictory practices geared towards development or progress and a history of allowing outside groups to control or privatize resources. As caretakers,

participants felt strongly that indigenous peoples must be the role models. The role begins by returning to the original teachings of truth, respect, harmony and reciprocity and affirming those beliefs in their own words to the outside world.

### **Proposals**

Along with re-affirming the inherent rights of indigenous peoples, delegates proposed a number of specific actions that could be undertaken in order for these ideas to become realized. Some of the most prominent ideas are given below:

- ***What takes place should not remain here, but should be shared with others.***  
Delegates discussed ways in which the ideas voiced at this Convening could be carried beyond this gathering, through electronic and written media and within communities. They stressed the need to share upcoming events, forums and projects that would continue the dialogue.
- ***Engage with governments.*** Delegates stressed the need to actively engage with governments in four arenas: with indigenous nations to nations (what took place during the Convening); with local governments; with national governments and with international governments.
- ***Utilize electronic resources/other media.***
  - Web page, email, etc. in order to stay connected and communicate ideas and upcoming events.
- ***Utilize current declarations or resolutions.*** Delegates urged that indigenous peoples utilize the ***United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples***. The declaration took over 20 years to draft and was accepted by 144 nations and is now law. It includes useful information, relevant topics and points, 45 articles and discussions about topics from land to resources to wildlife.
- ***Educate indigenous peoples to protect our rights regarding genetic research.*** Delegates specifically mentioned the need to protect their rights regarding scientific genetic research, and protecting genetic biodiversity, from corporate control, ownership and theft. These rights are recognized (rights to full, inherent, and prior rights) in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- Delegates expressed their desires for the ***Declaration*** that results from the Convening.
  - This declaration should come from our inherent rights and from our traditional laws and ways as the foundation.
  - Other alliances and agreements between indigenous groups and other agencies will be shared as examples or tools.
  - Delegates urged that language should insist that indigenous groups not only be consulted during the decision making process, but accommodated.

- Include indigenous health as a birthright.
- Changing the language that we use to change our position and move beyond mere sustainability and create cultures of leadership and community. Infusing what we do here with affirmation.
- ***Involve youth.*** Delegates reiterated the need to bring young people into the discussion and involve youth groups in upcoming events.
- ***Develop Assessment Tools.*** Delegates discussed the need for tribes to get involved in the development of assessment tools, such as health impact assessments. These tools are currently being developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Bank. The importance of Environmental Impact Statements was also noted.
- ***Education.*** The following are specific examples of ideas brought forth regarding education:
  - Reinforcing the sacredness of nature in schools; do not place all value on material wealth.
  - We need a mechanism to keep and care for an effective education.
  - Start education from home – this allows a guideline and empowers us to retake knowledge for ourselves.
- ***Share Traditional Ecological Knowledge*** with each other, as well as our children.
- ***Adopt better environmental practices within indigenous communities.***
  - Cleaner methods, green transportation, clean fuel sources and recycling.
  - Green education.
  - Understanding the dangers in products and plastics.
  - Be accountable. Speak out when someone is polluting.
  - Start from within communities and build gradually; promote and encourage law and legislation to penalize abuses; implement taxes on excessive use or abuse of water or lumber.

### **The Palenque Charter**

On day two, delegates divided into four groups according to the four elements of Water, Air, Earth and Fire. These sessions were proposed in order to generate ideas that would be reflected in the Charter. That evening, charter writers began drafting the document.

By the afternoon session of day three, the initial Charter was read to the group and presented to the spiritual leader Elmer Courchene, Canada/Assembly of First Nations.

## **Closing**

During the closing, speakers reported the results of discussions and presented the Palenque Charter, later renamed the Message of the Living Spirit of the *Convening of Indigenous Peoples for the Healing of Mother Earth* to indigenous representatives, guests

and government representatives from Canada, Mexico and the United States. The Message is attached to this report as Attachment 3.

Closing speakers included: Juan Sánchez Jiménez, Mexico, Julian Dominguez Lopez Portillo, Secretary of Environment, Urban Development and Housing of the State of Chiapas, Adrian Vazquez, Executive Director of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (Attachment 4), Juan Rafael Elvira Quesada, Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources of Mexico (Attachment 5), Deputy National Chief Rick Simon, Canada/Assembly of First Nations, Violet Ford, Canada/Vice-President of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, Debra Harry, United States/Northern Paiute of Nevada, Larry Mercurieff, United States/Aleut of Alaska, Lucia Manzano Moreno, Mexico, Oliverio Patricio Jimenex, Mexico, Carol Jorgensen, Director of US Environmental Protection Agency's American Indian Environmental Office and Walter Porter, United States/Tlingit of Alaska.

The meeting concluded with a traditional exchange of gifts and closing prayer by Xicome Mazati.

***Message of the Living Spirit of the Convening of Indigenous Peoples for the Healing of Mother Earth***

The Message is attached to the Summary Report as Attachment 3.