

Thematic Discussion on Conservation and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
Statement by the ICCA Consortium
1 May 2019, UNPFII

Most of the planet's biodiversity is found in the customary territories, lands and waters of indigenous peoples and communities – some estimate up to 80%. Indigenous peoples' collective governance and stewardship systems – embodied in our cultures, worldviews, languages, knowledge systems and practices – contribute to nature even when that is not the primary intention. We are custodians and caretakers of our Territories of Life and collective lands and waters because our lives, cultures and wellbeing depend upon it. Indigenous values and customary laws have prevented the overuse and exploitation of our territories, and enabled us to assert our rights and responsibilities to sustainable self-determination. Indigenous peoples do not necessarily define or describe this as 'conservation' – we *live* it and are surrounded by it every day.

Much progress has been made in recent years – especially in international policy (IUCN) and law (UN CBD) – to appropriately recognise and support Indigenous peoples' contributions to nature conservation. We acknowledge and applaud those who have championed these concerns in many different fora.

At the same time, however, human rights violations continue around the world under the guise of 'conservation'. We condemn and demand an immediate halt to these injustices, and urge States and all other conservation actors to ensure Indigenous peoples have access to justice, remedy and redress, including through Indigenous justice systems. Such violations have created divisions and conflict along lines of worldview, identity and culture. But it doesn't have to be this way – in fact, it must not be this way. We cannot afford to fight with and harm each other when the health and survival of Mother Earth and all of our fellow inhabitants is at stake.

We must prevent conservation injustices from happening in the first place. To do so, we must usher in a new global understanding of conservation and the diverse approaches to it. This requires a shift in worldview: conservation is not about setting aside little islands of nature protected from people, it is about people respecting and living in harmony with nature for our ancestors and for our current and future generations. We cannot separate people and culture from nature: they are inherently intertwined. This global shift in conservation requires appropriate recognition and support for the collective territories, lands and waters governed and stewarded by Indigenous peoples. It also requires halting the industrial drivers of biodiversity loss and ecosystem destruction, which are often the same direct threats to Indigenous peoples who put their lives on the line to defend their territories.

As a global member-based association of more than 145 Indigenous peoples' and community organisations and supporting CSOs, and more than 300 individual Honorary members, the ICCA Consortium calls on:

1. The UNPFII to recommend to States, conservation organisations, financial institutions, donors and other private actors to appropriately support Indigenous peoples to secure, protect and defend their collective territories, lands and waters, including by halting industrial threats and incentives thereof, and preventing attacks on and criminalisation of our defenders;
2. The UNPFII to recommend to States that where formal systems of protected and conserved areas overlap with Indigenous peoples' customary territories, Indigenous governance and stewardship of these territories and areas shall be appropriately recognised and supported; and
3. Conservation organisations to strengthen their policies and procedures on Indigenous peoples' rights and a human rights-based approach to conservation, to the minimum international standards of UNDRIP and other international instruments, and to undertake the cultural and capacity shifts needed within their organisations to ensure full implementation on the ground where it matters most.

In closing, the ICCA Consortium would like to reiterate our commitment to supporting these issues and stands ready to assist the UNPFII and others with continuing work and implementation of recommendations. Thank you, Chair.

Intervention on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework during the session:

Parties and observers to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are currently developing the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Indigenous peoples and communities have to be centrally involved in the process and outcome of this framework, which is intended to help us achieve the 2050 vision of "Living in Harmony with Nature."

We call on the UNPFII to recommend that CBD Parties:

1. Ensure the post-2020 process is truly inclusive of Indigenous peoples and communities, including women and youth, and their worldviews and governance and knowledge systems;
2. Adopt a clear focus in the global biodiversity framework on the interconnections between nature and culture and on re-calibrating our economies to be in harmony with nature;
3. Recognise the significant contributions of Indigenous peoples and communities to conservation; and
4. Ensure Indigenous peoples and communities who are voluntarily – and often at great risk – protecting and conserving their collective territories, lands and waters are themselves protected from threats and can carry on their work safely.