

# Manifesto<sup>i</sup> for territories of life<sup>ii</sup>

(Version June 25, 2023 – submitted by the President to the GA of the ICCA Consortium)

This is a ‘living document’<sup>iii</sup>— it will be regularly reaffirmed, and enriched as required.

- We give thanks for life— the sacred gift that we keep receiving every instant and makes us one with the Earth, our mother;
- We give thanks for soil, fire, water, air, and all beings, from the tiniest to the largest, in the animal, plant, fungal, aquatic, mineral, spiritual, and cosmic worlds;
- We give thanks for our ancestors and all generations who have been engaging efforts and wisdom in support of life;
- We give thanks for all who traced paths on earth and sea, nourished seeds and breeds, learned and passed on ways of finding, growing, conserving and transforming food;
- We give thanks for all who developed languages, stories, music, crafts and homes, arts and rituals, knowledge and the skills necessary to shape and to create;
- We give thanks for all the *custodians* of territories of life— the mobile and settled human communities who co-evolved by bonding with the forests, grasslands, mountains, plains, islands, lakes, drylands, wetlands, rivers, tundra, glaciers and coastal and marine environments that, in turn, have kept nourishing over millennia their livelihoods, identities, and capacity to care.

**We, who live in territories of life and self-identify and mutually recognize<sup>iv</sup> as Indigenous peoples<sup>v</sup> and community<sup>vi</sup> *custodians*,<sup>vii</sup>**

**We, who understand the many values of territories of life and are determined to support the Indigenous peoples and community *custodians*,**

## **we affirm and pledge:**

- To live with **reverence, respect** and **care** for **Nature<sup>viii</sup>**— the essence of life and core of ethical values for many of us;
- To **seek ‘living well’<sup>ix</sup>** in territories of life, connected with our ancestors, future generations and the spiritual presences and worldviews that give us meaning;
- To **celebrate** territories of life as the collective heritage that supports our physical and spiritual health, wellness, creativity, and joy;
- To **exercise solidarity, mutual responsibility** and **respect, equity** and **active peace** within and among Indigenous peoples and community *custodians*;
- To **nourish** the **diversity** of languages, cultures, modes of learning, and worldviews within and among custodians, and to treasure the **living local knowledge systems** that help in the care, wise use and restoration of territories of life;
- **To uphold our shared humanity** while rejecting assimilation into colonial languages, cultures and worldviews and opposing fanatic nativism,<sup>x</sup> violence, and discrimination of all kinds, including based on gender, race, age, religion, tradition, physical and intellectual abilities, and socio-economic status;
- To **document** territories of life as spaces of natural and cultural diversity, wellbeing, learning, spirituality, active engagement of citizens and sustainable self-determination;

- To **seek appropriate forms of support** for territories of life, so that present and future generations of custodians can **sustain** themselves and contribute to their societies at large;
- To **respect and learn from the rules and institutions** that custodians define for themselves and to **strengthen** them by freely adopting **limits to material consumption**, building **moral economies**<sup>xi</sup> and seeking **appropriate levels of autonomy**;<sup>xii</sup>
- To strengthen **awareness, organization, and action** about:
  - *Territories of life*— living entities in themselves and grounds of all sustenance and diversity;
  - The *custodians* of territories of life— the Indigenous peoples and local communities who nourish livelihoods, cultures, moral economies, rules of living well, and self-determination based in their territories;
  - The *defenders* of territories of life—the custodians who courageously struggle to prevent the misuse and degradation of their territories and too often pay heavy prices for that;
  - The immense role of Indigenous and non-Indigenous *women*, and their knowledge, skills and aspirations in caring for territories of life in all their communities and beyond;
  - The importance of perpetuating the *local food systems* that provide *food sovereignty* in a mosaic of agroecological environments, including small scale fishing in wetlands and coastal areas;
  - The *historical and ongoing context* of injustices, colonization, militarization,<sup>xiii</sup> forced eviction and sedentarization, fragmentation and commodification of Nature, land and water grabbing for extractivism,<sup>xiv</sup> financial speculations, polluting and destructive production ventures and infrastructure, and all forms of international and domestic deceit, indoctrination and violent change that have been impacting territories of life and their custodians and defenders;
  - The potential benefits but also harms of *new technologies*, as digital representations and genetic manipulation are no substitute for life itself and the perspectives and manipulations of artificial intelligence and molecular biology must interfere neither with the intelligence of life nor with Indigenous and community knowledge grounded in territories of life;
  - The *traditional livelihoods and governance institutions* of the Indigenous peoples and community custodians who have maintained the *vitality* of territories of life over generations, including when unjustly criminalized;<sup>xv</sup>
  - The *new livelihoods and governance institutions* of communities who establish themselves with enthusiasm and creativity as aspiring custodians of territories of life;
  - The existence of Indigenous peoples living in *voluntary isolation*, whose rights to territories of life and culture must be acknowledged, respected and defended;
  - The ties among *biological, ecological, and cultural diversity* and the need to recognize territories of life as *bio-cultural landscapes* and *conserved areas*<sup>xvi</sup> that substantially contribute to limiting and adapting to climate change;
  - The urgent need for *national conservation policies* that provide for the restitution of the territories of life alienated from Indigenous peoples and community custodians and that recognize and support custodians— including economically— as they conserve bio-cultural diversity in both their *conserved areas* and the *protected areas* established by the State;
  - The urgent need for a *global conservation regime*, building upon territories of life, where Indigenous peoples and community custodians resume their historical responsibility of sustainably managing biodiversity for the benefit of all;
  - The urgent need for fundamental *change in national and global regimes*, moving away from unsustainable, exploitative, extractive, military-based economies and centralised governance;

- The critical role of territories of life and their custodians to ensure that *future generations* inherit a world that is diverse, just, and liveable.

Based on our shared sense of gratitude, affirmation, and pledge,  
and acting in **peace** and **collaboration** with our societies,  
**we ally in solidarity<sup>xvii</sup>** towards the  
**sustainable self-determination<sup>xviii</sup> of all custodians of territories of life.**

Organized as part of local, national, regional, and global networks, **we will:**

- Pursue the **resurgence, decolonization and self-strengthening** of Indigenous peoples and community custodians, and their **mutual recognition among peers**, based on renewed **relations and collective responsibilities<sup>xix</sup>** for territories of life;
- Pursue the **recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples** and the **collective rights of community custodians** to govern territories of life as **their commons** and necessary ground for the **survival of their culture<sup>xx</sup>**;
- **Collectively govern, manage and care for territories of life** as Indigenous peoples and community *custodians*, including by **restoring** and **regenerating** them where ecosystems have been degraded or wildlife decimated, so that present and future generations secure their wellbeing *in and as Nature*;
- **Conserve** territories of life, preventing their fragmentation, privatization, militarization, and commercialization, seeking them to be forever free from extractivism or any other ‘development’ undertaken without the custodians’ **free, prior and informed consent**;
- **Defend** territories of life and their custodians and defenders, **and resist** unjust governance of Nature, unsustainable development, and *perennial war* within but also beyond territories of life— valuing frugality, wellbeing, the global commons, and peace *everywhere*;
- Seek all dimensions of **social, environmental and climate justice<sup>xxi</sup>** within and beyond territories of life.

***Signatories:***

Teodoro Brawner Baguilat Jr., President of the ICCA Consortium  
The Council of Elders of the ICCA Consortium

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## Explanatory notes to the Manifesto for territories of life

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<sup>i</sup> The need to a ‘Manifesto for territories of life’ was established by the [ICCA Consortium](#) in January 2019. Since then, specific exchanges took place during Consortium’s meetings and international and regional assemblies, and a number of relevant declarations were produced. Drawing from those, as well as from reports, publications, and e-mail discussions among Members that had taken place since 2008, a specific Manifesto-focused exercise was carried out among the Members of the Consortium in 2022. The exercise lasted a few months, and its results were gathered by the secretariat. Based on all this, and grounded on the Consortium’s existing mission and vision, a first draft of this Manifesto was compiled by the Council of Elders in April 2023. The draft was promptly reviewed and commented by Council members and staff, and further drafts were compiled and sent for comments to the entire ICCA Consortium’s membership. The current version integrates the rich comments received in writing as well as during online discussions. The Manifesto has three parts. **Part 1** is not a preamble but **a call to gratefulness and unity**, something that we have shared at the beginning of most ICCA Consortium’s gatherings in diverse continents. This is followed by a needed specification that the Manifesto results from the solidarity alliance among two different groups of people: 1. Indigenous peoples and community *custodians* and 2. their *supporters*. **Part 2** is an affirmation and pledge to continue to preserve the **many values of territories of life** and the **diversity of cultures** that nourished them. It also describes some current issues and predicaments, listed under ‘raising awareness, organization and action’, which sketch **the context** that gave origin to the Manifesto. **Part 3** starts by naming the **overall objective and vision** of the organizations and individuals that will sign up to the Manifesto. This is followed by a **commitment to act**. It is sort of implicit that the ‘ICCA Consortium’ may change name and become a (global? multi-level? solidarity?) Alliance for territories of life. Clearly, **this Manifesto is not for all Indigenous peoples and local communities but only for those who self-identify and mutually recognize as custodians of territories of life and seek a level of self-determination as appropriate in their circumstances.**

<sup>ii</sup> The term ‘**territories of life**’ is not in caps and we propose NOT to abbreviate it as ToL to stress that the term is *not a label* but a *lingua franca* term to describe a major phenomenon, widespread and diverse. ‘**Territory of life**’ and ‘**custodians**’ are **interdependent concepts**, i.e., a territory of life is a territory that nourishes a custodian Indigenous people or community, and a custodian Indigenous people or community cares for a territory of life. We also say that custodians include the “...the mobile and settled human communities who bonded with the forests, grasslands, mountains, plains, islands, lakes, deserts, wetlands, rivers and marine environments that, in turn, have kept nourishing over millennia their livelihoods, identities, and capacity to care”. But we *do not offer* definitions. Two main reasons for this. The first is that many signatories of the Manifesto have their own names for their territories of life and a sense of the concept that is richer and broader than any definition. The second is that some openness and a sliver of ambiguity leave the concepts space to breathe and grow, they do not nail down a diversity of views, allowing them to evolve dynamically, at their own pace. This said, the Members of the Consortium have often spoken about three defining characteristics for territories of life: 1. A **close and deep connection** between a territory and its custodian indigenous people or community; 2. The custodian is capable of developing and enforcing rules about the territory (has a well-functioning **governance institution**); and 3. The rules and efforts of the custodian positively contribute to the **conservation** of nature and community livelihoods and **wellbeing**. These characteristics vary across diverse contexts and regions. Some custodians use the terms **defined** territories of life when the three characteristics are fully satisfied and **disrupted** territories of life for those that satisfied them in the past but do not today because of historical changes and disturbances that can still be reversed or counteracted. The term **desired** territories of life is used for those that never satisfied the three characteristics in the past but could develop them today as some communities are ready to act as custodians.

<sup>iii</sup> As a ‘**living document**’, this Manifesto will be regularly reaffirmed (e.g., in the occasion of the Consortium’s GAs) and enriched as required. Its signatories recognize the importance of a dynamic Manifesto in the current context of accelerating change imposed upon Nature and people. Yet, as they seek constant learning and sharing, the signatories also recognize and stress the **urgent need to ally**-- among Indigenous peoples *custodians*, community *custodians*, and organizations and individuals determined to support them— to transform the vision of the Manifesto into action *as soon as possible*.

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<sup>iv</sup> We say ‘**self-identify and mutually recognize**’ in opposition to ‘being recognized by the State’. ‘Self-identify’ recalls the self-identification of Indigenous peoples included in ILO Convention 169 of 1989 and is assertive of self-determination and self-strengthening. ‘Mutual recognition’ refers to *mutual acceptance and respect among peers*—i.e., among the Indigenous peoples and communities that self-identify as custodians. This key aspect of *solidarity and support* is essential to sustain self-determination.

<sup>v</sup> Many **Indigenous peoples** have historical continuity with the pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, and consider themselves distinct from the societies now prevailing on those territories. In this sense the term Indigenous is eminently political and takes its full meaning against the historical background of colonial, neo-colonial, and post-colonial States, engaging issues of justice and solidarity. The 2007 [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#) includes as guiding characteristics: self-identification as Indigenous nations and/or peoples; a shared history of suffering injustices, colonization and land dispossession; a web of place-based relationships; language, traditional practices, knowledge, and legal and cultural institutions distinct from those dominant in the national state where they reside; and knowledge, culture and practices that contribute to sustainable governance and management of human relationships with the natural world and beyond. The concept of ‘Indigenous people’ is extremely rich and should neither be used in simplistic ways nor flatten the particular histories and cultural diversities of peoples.

<sup>vi</sup> We understand as ‘**communities**’ those who ‘self-recognize as such’ and often – as in the case of afrocolombian or quilombola communities in South America or montane communities in Europe — have a long association with the territories they have traditionally used or lived on. A working definition of ‘community’ may be ‘a self-recognized human group that acts collectively in ways that contribute to defining a territory and culture through time’. A local community can be long-standing (‘traditional’) or relatively new, can include a single ethnic identity or multiple ones, and it usually ensures its own continuity by natural reproduction and care for its members and its life environment. Communities can be permanently settled or mobile. The members of a community usually have frequent opportunities of direct (possibly face-to-face) encounters and possess shared social and cultural elements, such as a common history, traditions, language, values, life plans and/or a sense of identity that bind them together and distinguish them from others in society. Importantly, a community *custodian* of a territory of life does possess or is actively developing a **governance institution** with the capacity of establishing and enforcing rules for territorial access and use. The conditions of custodianship may be historically complex, as when communities were forcefully moved from their original territories. While community custodians are more easily found in ‘rural’ environments, ‘urban’ communities may also self-identify as custodians (Ashish Kothari, communication to the Consortium Manifesto Team, June 2023).

<sup>vii</sup> All terms included in the Manifesto— and particularly the term ‘**custodians**’— require language-tailored translation as the literal translation may convey little of the desired meaning. In French, for instance, the literal translation of custodians is ‘*gardiens*’, term often perceived with a colonial connotation, i.e., not conveying an *active relationship of governing and caring for* but the simpler meaning of ‘managing on behalf of the owner’. We have chosen to translate it as ‘*protecteurs*’, which is still a compromise but may be better than ‘*gardiens*’. In other Latin languages (e.g., Spanish, Italian) the term describes fairly well the idea of receiving a territory from the ancestors and maintaining it for the future generations... For some, however, it still evokes the idea of mere ‘keepers’ rather than ‘decision-makers’. In many other languages (e.g., Dutch) it is truly hard to properly translate the term. **The Consortium is actively seeking a grassroots term in any language that would richly and exhaustively describe the unique bonds that connect a community to its territory of life, hoping to adopt that, in due time, as a *lingua franca* term for all its members.**

<sup>viii</sup> We capitalize ‘Nature’ following an explicit request from the May 2023 Regional Assembly of the Members of the ICCA Consortium in Africa.

<sup>ix</sup> The concept of ‘living well’ (*buen vivir*) has recently emerged strongly in Latin America. The subject of *buen vivir* is not the individual, but an entire community, in harmony within its environment [see: Gudynas E., & A. Acosta, 2011. “La renovación de la crítica al desarrollo y el buen vivir como alternativa”, *Utopía y Praxis Latinoamericana*, 16 (53): 71-83].

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<sup>x</sup> By ‘**fanatic nativism**’ we mean ‘racism based on place of birth’, the idea that only the people *born locally* should be fully treated as *humans*. This is today most pertinent for Europe and North America, but not only there, as the risk of intolerance, brutality, and violence towards ‘the others’ is a danger pertaining to all movements based on ‘territory’. The signatories of the Manifesto are aware of this danger. They value the *common humanity* of all and reject intolerant behaviour even as they defend their territories of life.

<sup>xi</sup> The concept of ‘**moral economy**’ was developed in Brazil by the Movimento de los Trabajadores Rurales Sin Tierra to describe local economies where *many more values than monetary* are practically in use. Only moral economies may have a chance to prevent the degradation of Nature and support social equity.

<sup>xii</sup> From the Greek *autos* (self) and *nomos* (rules), ‘autonomy’ means being able to provides the rules of the community—a clear political meaning. The term also implies a level of independence in assuring the conditions and necessities for life-- a clear economic meaning. For some, only a level of autonomy *at an appropriate socio-ecological scale* means *freedom* from the industrial system and its accompanying socio-ecological disasters. In this sense, as mass production and distribution and total dependence on salaried work necessarily imply the political and economic control by the few over the many, only territories of life with a level of autonomy at local or regional scale offer a chance for convivial governance by the custodians themselves [see: Berlain A., 2021. *Terre et Liberté*. La Lenteur Ed., Saint Michel de Vax].

<sup>xiii</sup> See: Human Rights Council Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2023. *Impact of militarization on the rights of Indigenous Peoples*, A/HRC/EMRIP/2023/2.

<sup>xiv</sup> ‘**Extractivism**’ describes as economic model centred on the removal of large quantities of raw or natural materials, particularly for export, with minimal local processing, little or no control by the communities at the sites of extraction, and little or no benefit accruing to them.

<sup>xv</sup> The **traditional livelihoods** of custodians, such as shifting cultivation and mobile pastoralism, have often been misunderstood, criminalized, and shamelessly swept aside. Their rehabilitation as sustainable and diversity-supporting livelihoods has barely started.

<sup>xvi</sup> An example of ‘**conserved area**’ self-defined, established, governed and managed by its custodian Indigenous people is the *Selva Viviente Kawsak Sacha* of the Sarayaku people of Ecuador (<https://kawsaksacha.org/>).

<sup>xvii</sup> As the Consortium has been a strategic association, **the Manifesto is principally a strategic document**. It does not wish to conflate in any way the diverse realities and perspectives of the myriads of Indigenous peoples and communities that may self-identify and be recognized by their peers as ‘custodians’ of territories of life. Rather, it calls for their **alliance in pursuit of the perpetuation of their heritage, cultures, and territories in self-determined ways**, i.e., ways appropriate for them and their circumstances.

<sup>xviii</sup> **Self-determination** is the crucial aim of the signatories of the Manifesto, and it is a rich and challenging concept that takes different meanings and involves different processes and results for different concerned Indigenous peoples and communities. Some focus on maintaining their **culture** (language, values, institutions, traditions, ceremonies, ways of living...). Others seek some form of **autonomous governance over land and the material basis for livelihoods**. Still others aim at a separate **deliberative body** that may secure a level of **political autonomy**. For many Indigenous peoples and communities, self-determination includes diverse and specific combinations of the three, as they seek to secure survival for their natural and cultural, material and immaterial heritage. Only for a small minority who explicitly say so self-determination implies political independence from the State. Self-determination is **fully embraced by the United Nations** (Article 1 of the UN Charter of 1945 calls for “respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples...”. Later, Article 1 of both the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 state that “*All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.*”). The International Court of Justice recognised the right of self-

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determination as "...one of the essential principles of contemporary international law" and described as "irreproachable" the assertion that the right of peoples to self-determination has an *erga omnes* character (see the case of East Timor ICJ Reports 1995, p. 90, at para. 29; see <https://www.icj-cij.org/case/84>). Self-determination is also recognized in international law as a **right of process**, which is proper to peoples (not to States or governments). Thus, the right to self-determination is an *erga omnes* 'hard' right, although a right to process, not to outcome, and a wide range of possible outcomes depend on the situation, needs, interests and conditions of the concerned parties (refs here: <https://unpo.org/article/4957>). Self-determination is explicitly at the core of the [UNDRIP](#) and implicit in the demands of many non-Indigenous custodian communities in the [UN Declaration of the Rights of Peasants](#). Respecting self-determination means diverse outcomes in diverse circumstances, from ensuring the will of an Indigenous people to remain in voluntary isolation to respecting the right to free, prior and informed consent, from recognizing a desired level of internal regulatory jurisdiction to full cultural and economic independence (e.g., language rights, autonomous food security, autonomous regional government)— all **impeding assimilation *de facto***. Self-determination also means *maintaining the capacity to define 'self-determination'* in any changing context. Some peoples engaged in struggles for self-determination are members of the [Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization](#). Others focus on limited territorial governance and seek both collective rights *and responsibilities* as part of specific global, national, and local alliances. While self-determination is included in the mission of the ICCA Consortium, this Manifesto highlights the concept as the key self-defined objective and vision of custodians of territories of life.

<sup>xix</sup> We interpret '**responsibilities**' as 1. responsibilities *towards one another* within the specific Indigenous people or community custodian as well as towards the past and future generations, and 2. responsibilities *towards Nature*. The term is not used to mean 'responsibilities towards the State' or to express a *condition* to obtain collective rights. Following Indigenous thinkers and leaders, we believe that responsibility for the land is a **privilege** rather than a condition for something else, and it is **the essence of true indigeneity**. This implies that **self-identification as custodians and mutual recognition by peers** need to **come first** and are **more important than recognition by the State**, including when this comes with a lubrication of money. According to Cherokee scholar and activist Jeff Corntassel, the transmission of indigenous and local knowledge to future generations, and the generation of new forms of community knowledge in the daily relations of livelihoods are necessary for sustainable self-determination to flourish. Relational responsibilities, rooted in place and kinship and often contained or expressed through customs and norms, rather than codified in legal statutes and/or court decisions, are characteristic of mature communities who both command respect for their rights and fulfil their responsibilities. The concept of 'responsibilities' rebalances attention towards the local, the community, the reality of the lives and identity of Indigenous peoples and communities rather than towards national and international fora, which are not part of the history, institutions, or culture of many such peoples and communities. [Corntassel J., 2012. 'Re-envisioning resurgence: Indigenous pathways to decolonization and sustainable self-determination' in *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1 (1): 86-101; Corntassel J. and T. Hardbarger, 2019. "Educate to perpetuate: land-based pedagogies and community resurgence", *International Review of Education* 65: 87–116].

<sup>xx</sup> Some **local communities** do have **collective rights** that are similar or equivalent to some (not all) of the rights of Indigenous peoples. If a local community has a **distinct culture** that is so **connected to a particular place** that its members' ability to continue to enjoy and perpetuate their culture depends on protecting its relationship with that place, some human rights tribunals and other bodies have held that **States cannot take actions that would adversely impact that relationship without the free, prior, and informed consent of the community**. The leading case is *Saramaka People v Suriname*, decided by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (John Knox, communication to the Consortium Manifesto Team, June 2023). The cultural connection is not an easy standard to meet, but many communities do meet it and deserve full protection of their human rights to their ancestral territory (Ali Razmkhah, communication to the Consortium Manifesto Team, June 2023).

<sup>xxi</sup> **Social justice, environmental justice and climate justice** have to do with governance in society and can be broadly characterized as comprising three interrelated dimensions: 1. **distribution** (e.g., fair sharing of wealth and opportunities, fair access to essential needs like food, shelter, medical care, and education, fair sharing of

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the costs and benefits of 'development', including environmental degradation, health risks, and climate change); 2. **procedures** (e.g., decision-making and enforcing processes that are fair, informed, non-discriminatory, and respect the dignity and human rights of all); and 3. **recognition** (e.g., awareness and appreciation of the identity, values, knowledge systems and institutions of all legitimate actors). Even more than conventional social and environmental justice, climate justice powerfully introduces the need to include in decision-making the consideration of *future generations*.