

II Internacional Meeting For Nature

Indigenous Peoples' World View and Sacred Sites

Indigenous Spirituality, Indigenous Peoples' World View and Protection of Sacred Sites

Playa del Carmen Declaration

The group of experts on Shamanism and Sacred Natural Sites assembled in Playa del Carmen, state of Quintana Roo, Mexico, on April 28-30 2005 for the International Meeting on Shamanism and the Powers of Nature, convened by the Mexican organization "Musica por la Tierra" and under the auspices of IUCN-The World Conservation Union:

Reaffirming that the concept of indigenous "cosmovision" or "vision of the universe" includes a wide variety of intellectual and spiritual expressions, concepts and values of indigenous peoples, although each group has its own particularities and specific terms to account for these rather complex and deep issues;

Underlining that an important element of such "cosmovision" is that the whole of the earth and its multiple natural manifestations – the land, the sky, the stars and the infra-terrestrial realms - are the true abode, the sacred temple of the human species;

Acknowledging that, although modern times set the pace to destroy nature and favour a culture of mercantilism that in turn generates a spiritual vacuum, the young generations, together with many indigenous communities, are now revitalizing this spirituality and are giving a new opportunity to these sacred and ancient structures;

Emphasizing that any approach to sustainable development in regions inhabited by indigenous peoples must consider indigenous spirituality as a key element from which to build a position of respect and veneration for nature;

We, participants at the Playa del Carmen International Meeting on Shamanism and the Powers of Nature,

PROPOSE to consider protection of sacred sites of indigenous peoples a crucial step towards the strengthening of their cultures, the conservation of nature and the maintenance of spiritual values linked to nature and humanity;

RECOMMEND that protection of sacred sites of indigenous peoples should be based on their free, informed, prior informed consent, and should fully incorporate the communities and peoples owning and using those sites as the key actors towards their protection;

REAFFIRM that peoples and communities have the right to confidentiality with regards to their sacred sites;

PROPOSE that, in order to achieve the objective of the effective conservation and protection of sacred sites of indigenous peoples around the world, the following steps should be taken:

- a. To work in the development and adoption of international and national legislation to guarantee the protection of sacred sites, while acknowledging the rights of indigenous peoples upon these sites and their sustainable management;
- b. To promote research on sacred sites, beginning with the mapping of their location, identifying their rightful owners and the most pressing threats menacing their survival;
- c. To acknowledge those sacred natural sites that do harbour rich biodiversity as part of protected areas networks, when and if this inclusion is favoured by the owners of such sites and on condition that protected area networks fully respect the rights of such owners;
- d. To promote awareness-raising campaigns targeting national societies, about the need to respect sacred sites and indigenous spirituality;
- e. To call on the mass media to get involved and support awareness-raising efforts;
- f. To support the transfer of traditional knowledge and values associated with sacred sites to the new generations of indigenous peoples;

- g. To offer information and capacity building programmes on topics such as legislation and management tools to interested communities, so that they effectively face the new challenges that sacred sites face nowadays;
- h. To promote intercultural dialogue at all levels, involving among others institutionalized religions, so as to favour the respect for sacred sites and indigenous spirituality;
- i. To promote and strengthen relationships between indigenous authorities and government agencies, in conditions of equity and respect, on all matters pertinent to the protection and management of sacred sites;
- j. To protect all sacred sites on the basis of their cultural values, independently of their biological or natural attributes as identified by formal science.
- k. To promote the protection of sacred natural sites as a bridge between the protection of nature and the strengthening of cultura (understood as the way of living), and as valid instrument to favour a new conservation philosophy that fully integrates the satisfaction of cultural, economic and social needs of the communities involved;
- l. To work for the inclusion of protection of sacred sites in the agenda of the Second Decade of the World's Indigenous People (2005-2015), and on the review of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);
- m. To call upon governmental authorities and institutions to build a policy of dialogue, coordinated efforts and support to communities protecting their sacred sites;
- n. To take these recommendations to indigenous communities, organizations and entities that work at the local level with sacred sites, as a way of testing, validating and enriching them.

Finally, we, participants at the Playa del Carmen International Meeting on Shamanism and the Powers of Nature,

ACKNOWLEDGE with appreciation the participation and inputs of the indigenous experts of the Mayan people of Mexico and Guatemala;

EXPRESS our gratitude to the people of Playa del Carmen, to “Musica por la Tierra”, to the Trust Fund for the Riviera Maya and “Hotel Mayan Resort” Riviera Maya for having hosted, convened and successfully organized this meeting.

Playa del Carmen, Mexico, 30 April 2005