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INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' SEATTLE DECLARATION

on the occasion of the
Third Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization
November 30 - December 3, 1999

We, the Indigenous Peoples from various regions of the world, have come to Seattle to express our great concern over how the World Trade Organization is destroying Mother Earth and the cultural and biological diversity of which we are a part.

Trade liberalization and export-oriented development, which are the overriding principles and policies pushed by the WTO, are creating the most adverse impacts on the lives of Indigenous Peoples. Our inherent right to self-determination, our sovereignty as nations, and treaties and other constructive agreements which Indigenous nations and Peoples have negotiated with other nation-states, are undermined by most of the WTO Agreements. The disproportionate impact of these Agreements on our communities, whether through environmental degradation or the militarization and violence that often accompanies development projects, is serious and therefore should be addressed immediately.

The WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AOA), which promotes export competition and import liberalization, has allowed the entry of cheap agricultural products into our communities. It is causing the destruction of ecologically rational and sustainable agricultural practices of Indigenous Peoples.

Food security and the production of traditional food crops have been seriously compromised. Incidents of diabetes, cancers, and hypertension have significantly increased among Indigenous Peoples because of the scarcity of traditional foods and the dumping of junk food into our communities.

Small-scale farm production is giving way to commercial cash-crop plantations further concentrating ancestral lands into the hands of few agri-corporations and landlords. This has led to the dislocation of scores of people from our communities who then migrate to nearby cities and become the urban homeless and jobless.

The WTO Forests Products Agreement promotes free trade in forest products. By eliminating developed country tariffs on wood products by the year 2000, and developing country tariffs by 2003, the Agreement will result in the deforestation of many of the world's ecosystems in which Indigenous Peoples live.

Mining laws in many countries are being changed to allow free entry of foreign mining corporations, to enable them to buy and own mineral lands, and to freely displace Indigenous Peoples from their ancestral territories. These large-scale commercial mining and oil extraction activities continue to degrade our lands and fragile

ecosystems, and pollute the soil, water, and air in our communities.

The appropriation of our lands and resources and the aggressive promotion of consumerist and individualistic Western culture continue to destroy traditional lifestyles and cultures. The result is not only environmental degradation but also ill health, alienation, and high levels of stress manifested in high rates of alcoholism and suicides.

The theft and patenting of our biogenetic resources is facilitated by the TRIPs (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) of the WTO. Some plants which Indigenous Peoples have discovered, cultivated, and used for food, medicine, and for sacred rituals are already patented in the United States, Japan, and Europe. A few examples of these are ayahuasca, quinoa, and sangre de drago in forests of South America; kava in the Pacific; turmeric and bitter melon in Asia. Our access and control over our biological diversity and control over our traditional knowledge and intellectual heritage are threatened by the TRIPs Agreement.

Article 27.3b of the TRIPs Agreement allows the patenting of life-forms and makes an artificial distinction between plants, animals, and micro-organisms. The distinction between "essentially biological" and "non-biological" and "microbiological" processes is also erroneous. As far as we are concerned all these are life-forms and life-creating processes which are sacred and which should not become the subject of private property ownership.

Finally, the liberalization of investments and the service sectors, which is pushed by the General Agreement of Services (GATS), reinforces the domination and monopoly control of foreign corporations over strategic parts of the economy. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund impose conditionalities of liberalization, deregulation and privatization on countries caught in the debt trap. These conditionalities are reinforced further by the WTO.

In light of the adverse impacts and consequences of the WTO Agreements identified above, we, Indigenous Peoples present the following demands:

We urgently call for a social and environmental justice analysis which will look into the Agreements' cumulative effects on Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Peoples should be equal participants in establishing the criteria and indicators for these analyses so that they take into consideration spiritual as well as cultural aspects.

A review of the Agreements should be done to address all of the inequities and imbalances which adversely affect Indigenous Peoples. The proposals to address some of these are as follows;

For the Agreement on Agriculture

- a. It should not include in its coverage small-scale farmers who are mainly engaged in production for domestic use and sale in the local markets.
- b. It should ensure the recognition and protection of rights of Indigenous Peoples to their territories and their resources, as well as their rights to continue practicing their indigenous sustainable agriculture and resource management practices and traditional livelihoods.
- c. It should ensure the food security and the capacity of Indigenous Peoples to produce, consume and trade their traditional foods.

With regard to the liberalization of services and investments we recommend the following:

- a. It must stop unsustainable mining, commercial planting of monocrops, dam construction, oil exploration, land conversion to golf clubs, logging, and other activities which destroy Indigenous Peoples' lands and violate the rights of indigenous peoples' to their territories and resources.
- b. The right of Indigenous Peoples to their traditional lifestyles, cultural norms and values should likewise be recognized and protected.
- c. The liberalization of services, especially in the areas of health, should not be allowed if it will prevent Indigenous Peoples from having access to free, culturally appropriate as well as quality health services.
- d. The liberalization of finance services which makes the world a global casino should be regulated.

On the TRIPs Agreement, the proposals are as follows:

- a. Article 27.3b should be amended to categorically disallow the patenting of life-forms. It should clearly prohibit the patenting of micro-organisms, plants, animals, including all their parts, whether they are genes, gene sequences, cells, cell lines, proteins, or seeds.
- b. It should also prohibit the patenting of natural processes, whether these are biological or microbiological, involving the use of plants, animals and micro-organisms and their parts in producing variations of plants, animals and micro-organisms.
- c. It should ensure the exploration and development of alternative forms of protection outside of the dominant western intellectual property rights regime. Such alternatives must protect the knowledge and innovations and practices in agriculture, health care, and conservation of biodiversity, and should build upon indigenous methods and customary laws protecting knowledge, heritage and biological resources.
- d. It should ensure that the protection offered to indigenous and traditional knowledge, innovation and practices is consistent with the Convention on Biological Diversity (i.e., Articles 8j, 10c, 17.2, and 18.4) and the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources.
- e. It should allow for the right of Indigenous Peoples and farmers to continue their traditional practices of saving, sharing and exchanging seeds, and cultivating, harvesting and using medicinal plants.
- f. It should prohibit scientific researchers and corporations from appropriating and patenting indigenous seeds, medicinal plants, and related knowledge about these life-forms. The principles of prior informed consent and right of veto by Indigenous Peoples should be respected.

If the earlier proposals cannot be ensured, we call for the removal of the Agreement on Agriculture, the Forest Products Agreements and the TRIPs Agreement from the WTO.

We call on the member-states of the WTO not to allow for another round whilst the review and rectification of the implementation of existing agreements has not been done. We reject the proposals for an investment treaty, competition, accelerated industrial tariffs, government procurement, and the creation of a working group on biotechnology.

We urge the WTO to reform itself to become democratic, transparent and accountable. If it fails to do this we call for the abolition of the WTO.

We urge the member nation-states of the WTO to endorse the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the current text of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the ratification of ILO Convention 169.

We call on the peoples' organizations and NGOs to support this "Indigenous Peoples' Seattle Declaration" and to promote it among their members.

We believe that the whole philosophy underpinning the WTO Agreements and the principles and policies it promotes contradict our core values, spirituality and worldviews, as well as our concepts and practices of development, trade and environmental protection. Therefore, we challenge the WTO to redefine its principles and practices toward a "sustainable communities" paradigm, and to recognize and allow for the continuation of other worldviews and models of development.

Indigenous peoples, undoubtedly, are the ones most adversely affected by globalization and by the WTO Agreements. However, we believe that it is also us who can offer viable alternatives to the dominant economic growth, export-oriented development model. Our sustainable lifestyles and cultures, traditional knowledge, cosmologies, spirituality, values of collectivity, reciprocity, respect and reverence for Mother Earth, are crucial in the search for a transformed society where justice, equity, and sustainability will prevail.

Statement by the Indigenous Peoples' Caucus convened and sponsored by the Indigenous Environmental Network USA/CANADA, Seventh Generation Fund USA, International Indian Treaty Council, Indigenous Peoples Council on Biocolonialism, the Abya Yala Fund, and TEBTEBBA (Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education), 1 December 1999, Seattle, Washington, USA.

Other indigenous peoples' organizations, NGOs and individuals who wish to sign on to this statement, send email to:

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