

Declaration of Indigenous Corn Keepers Conference (UchbenKah)

January 19, 2020
Pueblo Viejo, Belize

We, as Indigenous Peoples from Queqchi, Mopan Maya, Yucatec Maya, as well as Apache Navajo, Hopi, Mohawk, Pueblo communities from North American who have gathered at the first UchbenKah Corn Conference, come to this sacred territory to share our knowledge and wisdom, and to plan for the future of our communities and our Peoples.

As farmers our lifeway is rooted in growing our own food and protecting the seeds that have been passed down for generations. Our farming teaches us many ethics, like how to organize our communities and governments, and how to be proud of who we are. We are connected here through the recognition that corn is who we are as a people, and a desire to bridge the networks between our communities that have been severed. Together we shared stories about the importance of preserving traditional farming practices, and protecting traditional seeds from the threats of hybrid seeds and Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs).

Even though we come from different regions, from different ecosystems and environments, we acknowledge that we are all connected through our corn. We also acknowledge that we have lost so much of our traditional lifeways, but we will no longer allow this sacred food to be threatened by hybrid or Genetically Modified Organisms promoted by those who do not honor the sacred memory of our corn. We commit, to continue to build our power so that we can secure the future integrity and purity of our local seeds as indigenous farmers.

Towards this end we have developed this Declaration to outline our shared commitments moving forward and to exercise our inherent rights as Indigenous Peoples.

We declare;

1. We will commit to continuing the traditional and cultural practices of our ancestors that connect us as people, in the protection and propagation of our sacred corn seeds, and all our traditional foods and medicines that our people have depended on for generations. We know that to feed our selves requires us to center our responsibilities to our families and our communities in the growing of our food, which includes revitalizing the traditional teachings of our ancestors and passing them onto our children. We do this to honor that the knowledge we have from our ancestors is a gift from our creator and a gift from our mother, the corn.
2. We commit to connecting elders with young people through our traditional language, which is the essence of who we are as people.
3. We will integrate these teachings and practices into the educational systems from the primary school level so that our youth will know more about traditional farming.

4. We will form an open committee or association to represent a bigger body that can represent the concerns of all our farmers.
5. We will locate keepers local traditional seed varieties and propagate them so to be able to share and protect our seeds with farmers.
6. We will encourage farmers in our communities to utilize native local seeds, emphasizing seed sovereignty and traditional farming practices.
7. We will acquire technical and financial assistance in the development of local seed banks in order to make traditional seeds more available to our Indigenous communities.
8. We will seek recognition from local and federal governments of the issues that are important to Indigenous farmers.
9. We will elevate the status of farmers because food is important- not just commodity farmers but true farmers that raise animals and other foods and medicines.

Participating organizations ; International Indian Treaty Council , Itzamna Society , Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance , Mohawk Seedkeepers , Qachuu Aloom (Guatemala) , Seventh Generation Fund for Indigenous Peoples , Traditional Native American Farmers Association , Toledo Cacao Growers Association, Santa Familia Grains Vegetables and Legumes Cooperative , Ma Machakilha Maya Farmers Group, Uch'ben Kah Kin Ajaw Association, San Benito Poite Tourism Committee, Kanan Miatzil , Uchben'kaj Kin Ajaw Association (USAA)