

United Nations 2023 Water Conference

Statement by co-discussant Andrea Carmen, International Indian Treaty Council

Interactive Dialogue 1: “Water for Health, Access to WASH, Human Rights to Clean Water and Sanitation”

Choque Utesia, thank you Madame Chair.

Much of the dialogue around this Conference refers to water as a target, a “dealmaker for the health and prosperity of people and the planet”. A resource to manage, own or, best case, cherish and protect, but still something outside of ourselves. I remind all of us in this room, and all those listening around the world, that we are all mainly made of water. Water was our first home in our mother’s wombs. In our Yaqui creation story, we came out of the water. Some of us stayed to live on land, and some of us, our close relatives the dolphins and the whales, returned to the water. They are also watching to see what we decide here so that they can survive.

As we gather this week in New York City to make commitments for the protection of water, we are also committing to defend the lives of our children, grandchildren and each and every living thing on this planet that we depend on and love. For Indigenous Peoples, water is not only the sacred source of life. It is itself a living being with its own spirit and power.

Article 25 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007 as a minimum standard and living commitment by States, affirms that *“Indigenous Peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.”*

For Indigenous Peoples to fulfill these sacred responsibilities, our rights must be respected and implemented, including to our lands and territories, cultural heritage, self-determination, participation in decision-making and free prior and informed consent. We are both willing and obligated to participate in actions on all levels to protect and maintain the integrity and health of water in all its forms based on our millennial knowledge and practices. Real solutions require full and effective participation of diverse stakeholders and rightsholders including Indigenous Peoples.

In closing I share the action commitment submitted by Indigenous Peoples from all regions: ***“Indigenous Peoples commit to actively engage, coordinate and plan with national, regional and local governments as well as UN bodies, based on their full recognition of our rights and respect for the value of our contributions, in order to produce positive results for the protection of water, and promote solutions that benefit our future generations, the natural world and all humanity”.***

Vaa'am itom jjiapsi, Mní wičhóni, Water is Life. Thank you.