Dear Special Rapporteur De Shutter,

Please receive our respectful greetings.

The Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN),is an Indigenous Non-Govenmental Organization based in Bemidji, Minnesota, USA, accredited to the UNFCCC. We very much appreciate the opportunity to contribute to your study on Just Transition. Since our inception we have been studying what kind of a world Indigenous Peoples want and what we should be doing to achieve it. Our Protecting Mother Earth Conferences in the US and Canada, from 1990 to 2010, served this end, as did gatherings and conversations with Indigenous Women’s societies, councils of elders, spiritual authorities, individual elders, and always with the participation of our indigenous youth.

We collected the results at our 2019 Just Transition Assembly.[[1]](#endnote-1) They were sent to every Tribe in the country and received no negative feedback. We therefore explicitly consent that our submission, particularly the attachment to this email, be posted on your official website.

If you have any questions or comments, please direct them to us at your earliest convenience.

Thank you,

Tom BK Goldtooth, Executive Director

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A JUST TRANSITION FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES*[[2]](#endnote-2)*

“The Creator has entrusted us a sacred responsibility to protect and care for the land and all of life, as well as to safeguard its well being for future generations to come.” Circles of Wisdom: Native Peoples/Native Homelands Climate Change Workshop held in Albuquerque, New Mexico, November 1998

Prophesies, here in Turtle Island, tell of a time when our Indigenous Peoples will rise up, like coming out of a haze, a dark mist, waking up into the Light of Understanding of who we really are and our true place in the universe. This will be a time of transformation and transition.

This transformation will involve the settler people and immigrants that arrived here to Turtle Island, whether by choice or forced choice. New alliances will be formed. A new beginning is on the horizon, for building a new world, confronting violence against our women, our children and against the Creative Female Principles of the sacredness of our Mother Earth.

Just Transition is a new term, but to most of our Indigenous peoples, it is understood, first by our heart, and secondly by our mind. Just Transition is a framework, a set of principles, to shift from a “stopping the bad to building the new”. In Indigenous thought, it is a healing process of understanding historical trauma, internalized oppression, and de-colonization leading to planting the seed and feeding and nurturing the Good Way of thinking. It is lifting up Original Instructions and Teachings of respecting ourselves, our clans, our family systems and how we are all related with all living things and our relationship with the

spirit, personality and consciousness of the sacredness of Mother Earth and Father Sky.

Just Transition is a framework for a fair shift to an economy that is ecologically sustainable, equitable and just. After centuries of global plunder, the profit-driven, growth-dependent, industrial economy is severely undermining the life support systems of Mother Earth. An economy based on extracting from a finite system faster than the capacity of the Earth to regenerate will eventually come to an end. Our Indigenous Nations must be ready.

A Just Transition requires us to build an economy for life in a way that is very different than the economy we are in now. This calls for strategies that democratize, decentralize and diversify economic activity while we damper down consumption, and redistribute resources and power. Just Transition initiatives shift the economy from dirty energy to energy democracy, from tribal housing with black mold and energy inefficiency to energy efficiency investments and green affordable sustainable buildings, from landfills to zero waste, from poor diets and high costs of buying food from industrialized systems in reservation border towns, to reestablishing our indigenous agricultural systems and from destructive development to ecosystem restoration.

The following Indigenous Principles of Just Transition is a result of this process. It is only a guide for our Indigenous peoples – our American Indian, Alaska Natives and the Canadian First Nations, and other Indigenous Peoples of the four-directions of Mother Earth – to use, if you chose to rebuild your Nation and community. Each Indigenous Nation and its community have our own experts and ways of engaging in these concepts of Just Transition. You may have your own terminology, whether it is in your original language or not.

*INDIGENOUS PRINCIPLES OF JUST TRANSITION*

*Mother Earth is a living female organism. Water is her lifeblood. With Father Sky, the air and atmosphere, with the soil, the fire within, and water, are the source of life to be protected, not merely a resource to be exploited, degraded, polluted, privatized and conmmodified. Indigenous peoples acknowledge the obligations that all decision-making is guided by consideration of the welfare and well-being of the seven generations to come.*

*Recognizing the rights of Mother Earth and Nature, places responsibilities and obligations of all people to live within, not above, the natural world, of which we are only one part. There is no separation between how we treat Mother Earth and how we treat ourselves. It is necessary for humanity to transform its human relationship with nature from a property-based to a legal rights-bearing entity. The rights of humans do not extend to the domination of nature. The demand for the recognition of Indigenous rights and the rights and the rights of Mother Earth are the one and same. Just Transition rejects the financialization of nature that is creating a new commodity of nature by turning the sacredness of our Mother Earth’s life-cycling and carbon-cycling and capacity into property to be bought, traded or sold in a global market.*

*Indigenous knowledge is birthed by the* ***Original Instructions*** *given by Creator to our Indigenous peoples at the time of Creation. Indigenous knowledge systems must be respected and protected; our collective intellectual property rights must be guaranteed and ensured.Our traditional knowledge is not in the public domain; it is collective, cultural and intellectual property protected under our customary laws.*

*Indigenous peoples can make changes in our lives and take positive actions as individuals, families, clans, communities, traditional societies and within our Indigenous Nations. Just Transition recognizes a decolonization process that incorporates physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual strategies since the body, the mind, heart and the spirit are affected directly by colonialism. Just Transition requires the healing from historical trauma.*

*Indigenous wisdom calls for a transition and transformation away from an extractive economy of over-production, over-consumption, waste, and that treats Mother Earth and Father Sky as a dumping ground for pollution; to a regenerative living economy that recognizes ecological and community social well-being and the vital life cycles and capacities of Mother Earth. There is a need to move to an economic system based on a just low-energy society with sustainable, clean and renewable energy.*

*Our lands, waters and territories are at the core of our existence – we are the land, we are the water and the land and water is us; we have a distinct spiritual and material relationship with our lands and territories, water, ecosystems and all life; they are linked to our survival.*

*This includes Treaty lands and un-ceded lands and water, and ocean taken without consent. This authority extends not only to hunting, fishing, food, plant and medicine gathering, but also to our sacred areas, and our water-sheds and air-sheds, as well as sub-surface.*

*The relationship between Indigenous Nations and the United States and Canada is nation-t-nation and not merely government-to-government. Indigenous Nations and Indigenous peoples are not merely stakeholders.*

*Food is a gift of the Creator. Food sovereignty is about decolonizing our diets and revitalizing healthy and culturally appropriate foods that are hunted, fished, gathered and grown through ecologically sound and sustainable methods and to resist the global, industrial-scale food and farming systems that corrupts our health and freedom through inappropriate food production, genetic engineering, the large-scale consumption of water and burning out the soil with chemicals. Food sovereignty includes strengthening and asserting legal rights-based approaches on policies on hunting, fishing and gathering rights of Indigenous peoples; and forestry, fisheries, range land, conservation, environmental health, agriculture, and rural and community development in Indigenous lands and territories.*

*Mother Earth is a living female organism. Water is her lifeblood. With Father Sky, the air and atmosphere, with the soil, the fire within, and water, are the source of life to be protected, not merely a resource to be exploited, degraded, polluted, privatized and commodified. Indigenous peoples acknowledge the obligations that all decision-making is guided by consideration of the welfare and well-being of the seven generations to come.*

*A Just Transition recognizes the territorial integrity and rights of Mother Earth and the integrity of her living systems, together with Father Sky, that maintains consciousness, personality and spiri for all nature to exist, flourish and regenerate their natural capacities. It is our responsibility ot live within the natural laws and order that is sacred to all life on earth.*

*Recognizing the rights of Mother Earth and Nature, places responsibilities and obligations of all people to live within, not above, the natural world, of which we are only one part. There is no separation between how we treat Mother Earth and how we treat ourselves. It is necessary for humanity to transform its human relationship with nature from a property-based to a legal rights-bearing entity. The rights of humans do not extend to the domination of nature. The demand for the recognition of Indigenous rights and the rights and the rights of Mother Earth are the one and same. Just Transition rejects the financialization of nature that is creating a new commodity of nature by turning the sacredness of our Mother Earth’s life-cycling and carbon-cycling and capacity into property to be bought, traded or sold in a global market.*

*Indigenous knowledge is birthed by the* ***Original Instructions*** *given by Creator to our Indigenous peoples at the time of Creation. Indigenous knowledge systems must be respected and protected; our collective intellectual property rights must be guaranteed and ensured. Our traditional knowledge is not in the public domain; it is collective, cultural and intellectual property protected under our customary laws.*

*Indigenous peoples can make changes in our lives and take positive actions as individuals, families, clans, communities, traditional societies and within our Indigenous Nations. Just Transition recognizes a decolonization process that incorporates physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual strategies since the body, the mind, heart and the spirit are affected directly by colonialism. Just Transition requires the healing from historical trauma.*

*A Just Transition acknowledges the need for a local, tribal, national and global shared vision towards a new economy based on living in balance with the natural systems of Mother Earth.*

*Indigenous wisdom calls for a transition and transformation away from an extractive economy of over-production, over-consumption, waste, and that treats Mother Earth and Father Sky as a dumping ground for pollution; to a regenerative living economy that recognizes ecological and community social well-being and the vital life cycles and capacities of Mother Earth. There is a need to move to an economic system based on a just low-energy society with sustainable, clean and renewable energy.*

*A Just Transition recognizes our inerent rights, sovereignty and assertion of self determination over our ancestral waters, lands and territories and all natural landscapes inclusive within our ouwn laws, values, customs and traditions.*

*Our lands, waters and territories are at the core of our existence – we are the land, we are the water and the land and water is us; we have a distinct spiritual and material relationship with our lands and territories, water, ecosystems and all life; they are linked to our survival.*

*A JUST TRANSITION recognizes the authority of our Indigenous Nations is not limited to the colonial political boundaries of the reservation and reserves; and extends over the indigenous traditional indigenous lands and treaty territories.*

*This includes Treaty lands and un-ceded lands and water, and ocean taken without consent. This authority extends not only to hunting, fishing, food, plant and medicine gathering, but also to our sacred areas, and our water-sheds and air-sheds, as well as sub-surface.*

*A JUST TRANSITION acknowledges that indigenous rights, customary laws and sovereignty are not defined by non-indigenous laws, rules and regulations; or by dominant society forms of governance, economic development, and corporate structure.*

*The relationship between Indigenous Nations and the United States and Canada is nation-to-nation and not merely government-to-government. Indigenous Nations and Indigenous peoples are not merely stakeholders.*

*A JUST TRANSITION is the right of food sovereignty in Indigenous lands and territories with the right to define, defend and develop our own food and indigenous based agricultural and traditional food systems. Indigenous food sovereignty includes the freedom of seed as the embodiment of bio-cultural development.*

*Food is a gift of the Creator. Food sovereignty is about decolonizing our diets and revitalizing healthy and culturally appropriate foods that are hunted, fished, gathered and grown through ecologically sound and sustainable methods and to resist the global, industrial-scale food and farming systems that corrupts our health and freedom through inappropriate food production, genetic engineering, the large-scale consumption of water and burning out the soil with chemicals. Food sovereignty includes strengthening and asserting legal rights-based approaches on policies on hunting, fishing and gathering rights of Indigenous peoples; and forestry, fisheries, range land, conservation, environmental health, agriculture, and rural and community development in Indigenous lands and territories.*

*A Just Transtition encourages our Indigenous Nation, community and Indigenous grassroots, traditional and spiritual leadership, women and societies and youth to assume their role in supporting a transition and transformation, inter alia,*

* *Indigenous-based green economy*
* *Native energy justice and democracy*
* *Clean energy and energy efficiency*
* *Green, affordable, and energy efficient homes*
* *Community-based health care and healing center*
* *Sustainable community-based planning*
* *Ecosystem restoration*
* *Meaningful work and localized community-building jobs*

*An indigenous-based* ***Index for Living Well*** *(Buen Vivir) based upon our respective* ***Original Instructions*** *will define what sustainable development and what our standard of living means to the Indigenous Nation and its communities. This Index would establish standards for food, health, housing, local economies and building sustainable communities with meaningful work and stable livable income that provides a good standard of living well, for workers, families, communities and Indigenous Nations.*

*Action is needed seeking to eliminate hazardous radioactive, heavy metal and toxic chemical contamination and emissions on and near Indigenous lands and territories, and the broader Turtle Island by using our sovereign voices to demand the Canadian and U.S. governments to reduce and eliminate toxic releases, alter production processes, advocating for substituting safer chemicals, based on the principles of production mechanisms that use toxic use reduction policies, adopting the Precautionary Principles (7th Generation Principles), No Harm Principles, Rights of Future Generations, Keeping Fossil Fuels in the Ground, creating Nuclear Free Zones, as well as policies on Zero Waste.*

*This includes the ban of all new exploration and exploitation of oil, tar sands, oil/shale gas, coal, uranium, and natural gas, including transportation infrastructures and to work with governments to achieve 100% clean, renewable energy by 2030, and no later than 2050, without nuclear power.*

*The right of Free. Prior and Informed Consent is a basic underpinning to protect indigenous rights and interests that provides Indigenous Peoples with adequate and accessible information and whereby consensus and consent is determine in accordance with Indigenous Peoples’ customary laws and practices, and free from any external manipulation or coercion. This includes participation in setting the terms and conditions addressing the economic, societal, cultural, spiritual and environmental and climate impacts and reserving the right to say no.*

*Market based mechanisms have given way to the “financialization of Nature’ process, which separates and quantifies the Earth’s cycles and functions – such as carbon, water and biodiversity – for turning them into “units” to be sold in financial and speculative markets. Indigenous peoples here on Turtle Island and Indigenous Peoples all over the Earth see the commodification and quantification of natural resources and processes as flawed and as a false solution for mitigating climate change or the conservation of forests, biodiversity, oceans, water, and land.*

*Retraining of tribal workers and ecological restoration to communities impacted by this dirty energy and mining development is a critical component of Just Transition in Indigenous lands. Just Transition must recognize the role U.S. and Canadian governments have played, in their implementing colonial policies leading Indigenous Nations to become economically dependent on fossil fuel, uranium, mining, deforestation and other extractive industrial and western forms of development on and near Indigenous lands and territories.*

*The respect, protection and fulfillment of Indigenous people’s rights are enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It is one of the long-lasting solutions towards attaining a Just and sustainable world for Indigenous peoples. Full implementation of the Declaration, without qualification, and, within the domestic law and policies of the U.S. and Canada, can be an effective tool for Just Transition, the recognition of the collective and human rights of Indigenous peoples, particularly concerning our right to self-determination, identity, culture as well as control over our Indigenous lands, waters, territories, and resources.*

1. See, <https://www.ienearth.org/first-indigenous-just-transition-assembly/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Because of word limitations, the Principles of Just Transition were slightly edited for length. Please visit the IEN website, <https://www.ienearth.org/justtransition/> for the full text. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)