

# FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

## News Release

December 19, 2022

### FNLN Critical of the Continued Marginalization of Indigenous Peoples at COP15

(xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̓xwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliiwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) As the fifteenth Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity begins wrapping up on Kanien'kehá:ka territory in Montreal, the First Nations Leadership Council recognizes the significant and outsized contributions of Indigenous peoples across the globe in protecting the biodiversity within their territories and assert that Indigenous peoples must be equal partners at any table discussing and making decisions about management of their territories.

Over 80% of the earth's remaining biodiversity is stewarded by Indigenous peoples, a stunning achievement in the face of the rampant exploitation of natural resources and habitat destruction that characterizes the ongoing colonization of our lands. There is an inescapable economic component to First Nations' inherent title to our territories, and we have proprietary interests to all the lands and resources within our respective territories.

In the nearly 30 years since Canada signed onto the Convention on Biological Diversity, our understanding of the full extent of the biodiversity crisis and its root causes has deepened considerably. The Government of Canada's announcement of \$800 million to support four Indigenous-led conservation initiatives is a welcome acknowledgement of the powerful role that Indigenous peoples have had in stewarding our lands and ensuring their integrity for generations to come.

However, Indigenous peoples continue to be left out of decision-making at the COP15 negotiating tables. Despite the gradual advancement of Indigenous voices within the COP proceedings, Indigenous peoples still do not have a vote on matters that will directly impact their lands and livelihoods. The Convention on Biological Diversity, as with many other United Nations processes, is a state-led process in which the rights of Indigenous peoples are not guaranteed in any outcome. Despite these limitations, grassroots Indigenous organizers, and particularly the youth, have worked diligently to advance Indigenous priorities for conservation and biodiversity in a space that was not made for them.

If language to safeguard Indigenous Peoples' Title and Rights is excluded from a post-2020 global biodiversity framework to protect 30% of marine and terrestrial areas by 2030, Indigenous Peoples' lands will be freed up for access by states under the guise of conservation. Conservation projects must be planned and carried out with the full participation of



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Indigenous peoples and according to the minimum international standard of free, prior, and informed consent.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, UBCIC President, stated, “Without full consideration of our title and rights, the 30x30 framework has all the hallmarks of green colonialism. If conservation goals become another justification to make decisions about Indigenous peoples’ lands without their consent or even their participation, how is that anything other than a land grab?”

Robert Phillips, First Nations Summit Political Executive stated, “We’ve been protecting biodiversity in our Nations without the institutional support of states and the UN, and we need more tools to carry on that work. The successes of Indigenous-led conservation are undeniable, and the Crown and other states cannot pick and choose when and where to support our initiatives based on what’s convenient for them.”

“Indigenous people from all over the world have brought their voices to COP15, but we still don’t have a vote on the floor,” BCAFN Regional Terry Teegee concluded. “We’re free to make interventions as observers but the final decision-making is out of our hands. But the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity have also all ratified the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In Canada and every country, the articles of the UN Declaration and the standard of free, prior, and informed consent must be foundational to conservation planning.”

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*The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).*

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