



Final Statement of the Ethics in Action Workshop on the SDGs and the Magisterium of Pope Francis for Indigenous Peoples

Ethics in Action for Sustainable and Integral Development



Indigenous peoples, who have inhabited the world's lands before the arrival of later colonizers and settlers, are humanity's front-line stewards of sustainable development. Estimated to number around 400 million people, they have been taking care of their environment since time immemorial, living in symbiosis with nature. Elders from indigenous peoples have always taught their children that the Earth does not belong to us. This point of view enhances their sense of responsibility toward the well-being of the environment—the community, the animals, and the flora. For them, the notion of interrelation is obvious. Thus, when the Earth is suffering, her inhabitants are suffering; and when her inhabitants are suffering, She is suffering. In crucial ways, the indigenous peoples around the world are humanity's sentinels and pathfinders back to a path of integral and sustainable development.

Pope Francis, in his meeting in January this year with indigenous people of the Amazon, put it this way: "Those of us who do not live in these lands need your wisdom and knowledge to enable us to enter into, without destroying, the treasures that this region holds. And to hear an echo of the words that the Lord spoke to Moses: 'Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground' (Ex 3:5)"

In a world beset by the greed of untrammelled corporate power, indigenous peoples' experiences of the sacred root their philosophies of *buen vivir*, living well—a form of "shared well-being" that

includes the organic links between persons, communities and the earth. This holistic notion of *buen vivir* recalls the core truth that economies have a *telos*, a purpose, beyond profit. That purpose is shared well-being, the flourishing of all in a common good that includes the earth.

This has analogues in the diverse indigenous traditions. Examples include: (i) *Mino-bimadaziwin*, a cultural value and mandate from the Anishinaabe of North America to live a good, healthy life committed to continuous re-birth of the gifts of creation; (ii) *Malama aina*, a Hawaiian cultural value that outlines human's *kuleana* (responsibility) to take care of what nourishes us; (iii) *Sumac Kawsay*, from the Quechua peoples of the Andes, a concept of living well in balance with the living Earth and our human community.

Modern life, organized for individual self-interest and the pursuit of profit, has led humanity away from this profound notion of well-being, causing—in the words of Pope Francis—the “globalization of indifference.” Indigenous peoples can help lead the world back to deeper purposes, in a holistic spirit of participation, mutual consent, dialogue, solidarity, and peace.

Indigenous peoples regard the modern world as overly-influenced by a “masculine” value system—guided by such factors as speed, performance, logic, science, and spirit of conquest. From this perspective, the imbalances within social and economic life reflect the imbalances within the human spirit. This also gels with Pope Francis's criticism in *Laudato Si'* of the “technocratic paradigm” and the “myths of a modernity grounded in a utilitarian mindset (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market)” alongside his call for restoring “the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God” (*Laudato Si'*, 210). Indigenous wisdom calls upon human beings to restore balance not only supporting women and defending Mother Earth but by embracing more “feminine” values such as introspection, slowness, listening, meditation, creativity, collaboration, and patience. Nevertheless, indigenous peoples—like all others—should reflect on the value of the equal dignity of women, proposed by modern feminism, against all forms of paternalism and *machismo*.

The profound moral paradox of the indigenous peoples is that, almost everywhere, they have been marginalized and repressed, enslaved and slaughtered, sometimes to the extent of genocide (or what we call today “cultural genocide”), by colonizer and settler populations that followed. Throughout the history of globalization of the past half-millennium, colonizers arrived with voracious appetites for the resources of the lands, rivers, and oceans—in particular gold and silver—viewing the indigenous peoples as obstacles to their pursuit of wealth and power. More often than not, the colonizers brought powerful weapons, advanced technologies, and pathogens from abroad that enabled them to suppress the indigenous peoples. The indigenous people who were able to avoid enslavement and slaughter were forced into reservations or pushed into more marginal lands where it became increasingly difficult to feed their families. There were a few important exceptions to this—most notably the famous Jesuit missions, which were an example of

socioeconomic development for the common good and against forced labor.

The story of indigenous peoples is also one of profound moral strength, of their determination to survive, thrive and safeguard their cultures and languages on their own terms, despite hardships and oppression. Indigenous peoples teach us the virtue of resilience, hope, and faith, in the face of overwhelming hostile forces. In all parts of the world, indigenous peoples heroically strive to maintain their culture, languages, and connections with ancestors and ancestral lands, and to build a world of meaning for their own societies and for the world at large. In this way, the world's indigenous peoples teach all of humanity how to maintain hope and purpose in the face of great challenges.

The United Nations has recognized the unique role and vulnerability of indigenous peoples, adopting the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007. This Declaration makes explicit many core human rights, both individual and collective, of indigenous peoples, including the right: to be free from discrimination (Article 2); to self-determination (Article 3); to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs (Article 4); to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions (Article 5); to not be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture (Article 8); to not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories (Article 10); to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs (Article 11); to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages (Article 14); to participate in decision-making in matters that would affect their rights (Article 18); to the improvement of economic and social conditions (Article 21); to the lands, territories and resources that they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired (Article 26); to free, prior and informed consent, and consideration in good faith, prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories (Article 32); to maintain and develop contacts, relations and cooperation, including activities for spiritual, cultural, political, economic and social purposes, with their own members as well as other peoples across borders (Article 36); and others.

The role of indigenous peoples in Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals is also recognized at several points. Agenda 2030 recognizes the vulnerabilities and needs of indigenous peoples in line with the overriding objective “to leave no one behind.” The special needs and gifts of indigenous peoples in education, agriculture, hunting, trapping, picking, and fishing are also noted.

At the same time, Pope Francis recognizes the importance of what he terms “ecological debt”: “Inequity affects not only individuals but entire countries; it compels us to consider an ethics of international relations. A true “ecological debt” exists, particularly between the global north and south, connected to commercial imbalances with effects on the environment, and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time.” (*Laudato Si'*, 51).

Yet the harsh reality is that until today, indigenous peoples are not only on the front lines of the struggle for sustainable development, but they continue to face neocolonial power encroaching on their lands with ever greater and multinational force. Throughout the world, indigenous peoples are facing land grabs and displacement, pollution caused by extractive industries, and expulsion from their lands because of decisions to lay pipelines, harvest minerals, log forests, and for other purposes—without their say, approval, or even participation.

Recently, for example, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe of the Dakotas in the United States tried to resist the Keystone XL pipeline, but were ultimately overwhelmed by the power of the US Government in the service of private industry. Similarly, First Nations of British Columbia struggle until today against the Canadian Federal Government in resisting the Trans Mountain oil pipeline project that crosses many reserve lands. Such example can be multiplied in countless cases in the Amazon, Argentina, Chile, the Philippines, Polynesia, Africa, and other regions, where indigenous peoples are struggling against the abuse of their rights and their lands.

Pope Francis calls on the world, especially the very centers of power and wealth, to dialogue with the indigenous peoples, recognizing that they have unique knowledge regarding pathways to sustainable development. Dialogue also advances human rights, since participation in determining one's future is itself a fundamental right as well as the most important instrument to guarantee the fulfillment of other rights.

Ethics in Action calls, above all, for the recognition of indigenous peoples, with their history and culture, and for dialogue in solidarity and humility with the world's indigenous peoples based on a commitment to mutual respect, mutual responsibility, and mutual learning. This dialogue must be genuine, not a one-way monologue of the powerful making demands on the powerless. It must be a true conversation that recognizes shared fates and responsibilities, acknowledging that indigenous peoples possess not only rights but also unique kinds of knowledge that the entire world needs today.

Ethics in Action calls for a new framework of global sharing with indigenous peoples in the spirit of the universal destination of goods and in line with *Laudato Si'*. In many places in the world, indigenous communities are impoverished from centuries of displacement, discrimination, exploitation, attempted extermination or assimilation. Restoring to the indigenous peoples the financial and material means for *buen vivir* is a not just a matter of solidarity and charity, but also of justice and compensation for past misdeeds by colonizers and the iniquities of today's bullies.

Ethics in Action likewise calls for a new moral vision that recognizes the indispensable contributions of indigenous peoples in the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals. Their incomparable experience of the environment they live in, their traditional knowledge and special understanding of biodiversity must inform and reorient our global conception of development and our own relationship with the environment and the natural resources it provides.

General recommendations: Practical actions for the sustainable development of indigenous peoples

1. The promotion of the voices of indigenous peoples in UN processes within Agenda 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Climate Agreement;
2. The recognition of a special ecological and human debt in favor of the indigenous peoples by the colonizers to compensate the former for the destruction of their habitats and forests, as well as to atone for the unjust extermination of many populations;
3. The encouragement and technical support of bold plans of action by indigenous peoples to achieve the SDGs, adapted to the culture and contexts of indigenous peoples and in accordance with *buen vivir*;
4. The support for indigenous communities to access new official and private development financing needed to achieve sustainable development;
5. Supporting the leadership and safety of indigenous women, and indeed all initiatives helping women and promoting feminine values;
6. Supporting cooperation and exchange between indigenous peoples on best practices to secure the rights and promote development pathways that take into account the cultural and socioeconomic context of indigenous peoples
7. Recognizing that indigenous territories are an important complement to national parks and other protected areas, because such indigenous territories often have lower levels of deforestation and environmental degradation than those of national parks or protected areas.
8. Supporting programs allowing indigenous peoples to reconnect with their identity, their cultures and languages, so that they can participate even more actively into the elaboration of their own destiny and the destiny of the world.

EIA Working Group action items

1. The active and continuing partnership of *Ethics in Action* with the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative to protect and restore global forests, recognizing them not only as indigenous peoples' ancestral domains and sacred spaces, but also as vital habitats for diverse flora and fauna, as well as critical carbon sinks;
2. A call upon the UN Human Rights Commission, the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the World Trade Organization (WTO), to step up their efforts to stop land grabs and environmental damage to indigenous lands;
3. A call upon UNESCO and governments to revise education guidelines, encouraging contents relevant to local challenges and *planes de vida plena* and *buen vivir* for indigenous students; to revise the content presented to both non-indigenous and indigenous students in ways that address existing misconceptions and prejudice against indigenous peoples; and to promote indigenous forms of education and ways of knowing, particularly indigenous sciences such as agriculture, medicine, and navigation;
4. A call on countries with indigenous peoples to legally recognize their rights and set aside territories for those peoples on a scale that allows them to practice traditional lifestyles and

cultures;

5. *Move Humanity's* support for indigenous communities around the world, including the mobilization of philanthropic contributions toward sustainable development in and with indigenous peoples;
6. Supporting the upcoming Synod of the Bishops of the Pan-Amazon Region called by Pope Francis for October 2019. *Move Humanity* and its partners will work to establish a new *Fund for the Sustainable Development of the Amazon*, calling upon Brazil's leaders, high-net-worth individuals and key businesses to take leadership in providing necessary support.