

# INDIGENOUS PRINCIPLES OF *Just* Transition

RESPONSIBILITY AND RELATIONSHIP  
SOVEREIGNTY  
TRANSFORMATION FOR ACTION

## INTRODUCTION TO JUST TRANSITION

*“Indigenous prophecy meets scientific prediction. What we have known and believed, you also now know: The Earth is out of balance. The plants are disappearing, the animals are dying, and the very weather – rain, wind, fire itself – reacts against the actions of the human being. For the future of the children, for the health of our Mother Earth, Father Sky, and the rest of Creation, we call upon the people of the world to hold your leaders accountable.” Circles of Wisdom: Native Peoples/Native Homelands Climate Change Workshop held in Albuquerque, New Mexico, November 1998*

Since occupation and colonization of the Indigenous lands and territories of North America (Turtle Island), American Indian and Alaska Natives in the United States and First Nations and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada have been fighting for our now internationally recognized inherent rights to our lands, our rights for self-determination and sovereignty. The moment is now to stand strong and in solidarity in defense of our treaty territories, land, water, air and protection of the Circle of All Life.

Now is the moment to break the cycle of the U.S. and Canadian governments consistently pressuring Indigenous Nations and our communities to choose between western forms of economic development and our responsibilities as “guardians” for Protecting the sacredness and territorial integrity of Mother Earth and Father Sky in accordance with our respective Original Instructions, the is woven into our identity as Indigenous Peoples.



## A LEGACY OF EXPLOITATION, ECOCIDE AND ENVIRONMENTAL, ENERGY, CLIMATE AND ECONOMIC INJUSTICE

New forms of federal energy legislation with false incentives are designed to encourage the expansion of extraction and industrial-scale development on and near our Indigenous lands and territories by outside corporate interests. Once again, the dominant system is putting economics first, over our indigenous values, duties and responsibilities to protect the environment, ecosystems, and sacred and historical and cultural areas and the water of life.

The legacy of toxic and radioactive contamination left by fossil fuel and uranium development in some areas of our Indigenous lands remains to this day. Toxic facilities, mines and electrical generation facilities, including coal-fired power plants, nuclear power, and mega-hydro dams, pulp and paper mills and toxic smelters, have had devastating health, social, environmental, ecological and cultural impacts on Indigenous peoples and of or lands, at all stages of the energy cycle. Toxic and heavy metal contamination has caused cancer from radioactive mining waste and processing, to respiratory illness caused by air emissions from coal-fired power plants, oil refinery, oil and gas wells, and now hydraulic fracturing.

Our Indigenous Nations and communities are being targeted once again with plans by the U.S. government for long-term nuclear waste storage at Yucca Mountain, Nevada, a sacred area and treaty homeland of the Western Shoshone Nation. It is urgent that dominant society learn to live in harmony with the Earth. We cannot be idle no more.

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# TO RECLAIM OUR FUTURE, WE MUST CHANGE THE PRESENT

## JUST TRANSITION

*"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. It is told by many of these prophesies that our young generation will be stepping up, learning from the experiences and wisdom of the previous generations. It is a time of language, cultural and spiritual revitalization. New ways and old ways will be coming together in harmony.

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 strategies were first forged by labor unions and environmental justice groups who saw the need to phase out the industries that were harming workers, community health and the planet, while also providing just pathways for workers into new livelihoods. This original concept of Just Transition was rooted in building alliances between workers in polluting industries and fence-line and frontline communities.

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 dampen 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.

As Just Transition is becoming popular with different theories, practices and approaches, the Indigenous Environmental Network felt the need to compile a set of Indigenous-based principles of what Just Transition means to Indigenous peoples in North America-Turtle Island. A process was created to remembering the contributions of the many tribal voices of Indigenous Peoples that came to the Protecting Mother Earth Conferences that started in 1990 and continued to 2010.

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.

Our prayers are with our Indigenous Nations and communities that take this journey of d-colonization, Just Transition and transformation for building a sustainable and healthy way for yourself, your family, your clans, community, village and generations to come.

These principles are fundamental ideals for how the Indigenous Environmental Network envisions sustainable Indigenous Nations across Turtle Island. They are the foundation upon which Tribes and their communities can build localized, living economies for the next seven generations and beyond. How each Indigenous Nation and/or the community manifests these principles will most likely be different. But such diversity will only strengthen the coverage to re-invest in our power that speaks to our obligations as guardians of Mother Earth.

Together we will take action and address the root causes of climate change by changing the system – but first, within ourselves – and at the community level. Please keep us updated on your journey and how we can help.

# RESPONSIBILITY AND RELATIONSHIP

**A Just Transition** affirms the need for restoring indigenous lifeways of responsibility, duty, and respect to the sacred Creation Principles and Natural Laws of Mother Earth and Father Sky; to live in peace and to ensure harmony with the Circle of Life, with Nature and within all Creation.

*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 spirit for all nature, to exist, flourish, and regenerate their natural capacities. It is our responsibility to 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 the 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.*

**A Just Transition** recognizes indigenous knowledge. Indigenous peoples have a responsibility to maintain our traditional practices and sanctions for the protection, preservation, revitalization and usage of our knowledge, our languages, and our traditional intellectual and cultural properties.

*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.*

**A Just Transition** acknowledges we must mend and strengthen our Sacred Hoop; we must transition away from the patterns of conflict and division and confront the symptoms of colonization called *Internalized and Lateral Oppression*.

*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.*

# SOVEREIGNTY

**A Just Transition** recognizes our inherent rights, sovereignty, and assertion of self determination over our ancestral waters, land and territories, and all natural landscapes, inclusive within our own 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 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 is not defined by non-Indigenous laws, rules and regulations; or by dominant society forms of governance, economic development, and corporate structures.

*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.*

**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 diversity.

*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.*

# TRANSFORMATION FOR ACTION

**A Just Transition** encourages our Indigenous Nations, community and Indigenous grassroots, traditional and spiritual leadership, women societies and youth to assume their role in supporting a transition and transformation includes, but not be limited to:

- *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 centers*
- *Sustainable community-based planning*
- *Ecosystem restoration*
- *Meaningful work and localized community-building jobs*

**A Just Transition** requires action for Indigenous Nations to establish policies on an Indigenous-based *Index for Living Well*.

*An indigenous-based **Index for Living Well** 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.*

**A Just Transition** requires Indigenous Nations and community leaders to learn of, and, to become advocates for reducing and eliminating toxic chemicals, heavy metals and radioactive contamination that are slow to degrade, and that are persistent, bio-accumulate and bio-magnify in our traditional food web, ecosystems, and our bodies, especially within our women.

*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.*

**A Just Transition** inspires our Indigenous Nations to take action, calling for the U.S. and Canada to leave more than 80% of known fossil fuel reserves under the soil and beneath the ocean floor.

*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.*

**A Just Transition** requires the need for U.S. and Canadian governments to take action to create policies that harmonize the duty to consult with Indigenous Nations and their peoples utilizing the standards of Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC).

*FPIC 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.*

**A Just Transition** calls for the rejection of all market-based mechanisms that allow the quantification and commodification of Mother Earth's natural resources and processes, rebranded as 'ecosystem services', carbon trading, carbon offsets, conservation and biodiversity offsets, and financialization of Nature.

*These 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.*

**A Just Transition** demands the U.S. and Canadian governments to provide financial support for economic just transition for those Indigenous Nations that experienced these two governments playing a brokering role by introducing dirty energy and extractive mining industries into their tribal lands and territories.

*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.*

**A Just Transition** demands the U.S. and Canadian governments adopt and fully implement as legal policy, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), to be regarded as a "political, moral and legal imperative" without qualification.

*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.*