



TURTLE LODGE
INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR INDIGENOUS
EDUCATION AND WELLNESS



**National Centre for
Truth and Reconciliation**
UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

A COLLECTIVE STATEMENT REGARDING CLIMATE CHANGE

**From the National Turtle Lodge Council of Elders and Knowledge Keepers
In Partnership with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation**

**Written in Ceremony at the
Turtle Lodge International Centre for Indigenous Education and Wellness**

July 22, 2021

Elders and Knowledge Keepers from many different Nations across our homeland gathered from July 14-16, 2021 at the Turtle Lodge to seek guidance and direction in Ceremony, brought together by the recent uncovering of the graves of hundreds of children at residential schools across the country.

This is the last of three Statements that were issued by the Elders and Knowledge Keepers at the National Gathering. The first Statement prioritized the Children who have been found and the Children of today, who need to be positioned at the centre of all our efforts. The second called for the reclaiming of our Sacred Sites as the foundation of our rebirth and resurgence as a People in our arrival back to the spiritual ways of our Ancestors. Establishing the autonomy of our Sacred Sites is a key act of self-determination and reconciliation and will allow us to position the Children at the centre of our lives.

A dream was shared by one of the Elders at the Gathering. Many animals came to him in the dream and asked that a message be shared with the People: that they are dying because the People are poisoning the land.

An issue of great concern for the Elders is climate change. Many from the international community have been calling on the Elders and Knowledge Keepers to offer guidance and Indigenous knowledge-based approaches and solutions. Mother Earth is our home and our source of life, and we need to take care of her. Our health and well-being as human beings is directly tied to the health and well-being of Mother Earth.

The Elders highlighted two common concerns that unite us as humanity – our love for our Children and the issue of accelerated climate breakdown.



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Issues such as climate change, pandemics, racism, violence, mental illness, and addiction, are symptoms. The root of our dilemma, which has created these symptoms, is a belief system that humanity ought to dominate Nature. This attitude has led to a severing of our relationship with our source of life, the Earth.

When we lose touch with the Earth, we lose connection to our true spiritual identity, and a true understanding of our uniqueness, our purpose as humanity, our original instructions, and our duties and responsibilities. We have accelerated climate change because we have broken natural law. As much as there have been advancements in science and technology, we have not evolved morally and ethically. This is the crisis of our time.

The Knowledge Keepers of our Nations have been issuing warnings for a long time that what we do to the Earth, we do to ourselves. Yet we still refuse to accept these warnings. The Knowledge Keepers in their patience continue to appeal to humankind. We need a change of heart or we will not survive. Phenomena like the virus and extreme heat warnings are really just messages from nature. Still, some refuse to accept the reality of climate change. Money and wealth will not buy humanity out of the coming changes.

One thing the Elders are quite certain of is that we are just seeing the tip of the iceberg of the danger that is yet to come. We continue choosing the road of denial because it is much easier to live in denial than to make changes. We live with false hopes that our world will return to normal like before.

We cannot exist without a healthy planet. The amount of damage we have done to the Earth is now beginning to show in the imbalance we have caused. The recent extremely hot temperatures and severe drought in the west are something of great concern. It is obvious we have not prepared for the sudden extreme changes we are facing around the world. Today, much of our planning should consider preparing for these changes that are inevitable. That is our first challenge. Then, laying down a foundation for the future in becoming better stewards of the land.

The cure for all these symptoms we face as a human family is reconnecting to the land. Working in alliance with nature and her natural laws is the key to ensuring our survival. We take the children to the land to find their identity and to learn the ancestral ways of stewardship. The Earth teaches us what love and kindness really looks like.



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As the First Peoples it is most important to embrace our identity if we are going to be of any help in providing leadership and a foundation for our survival as humanity. All Peoples were given Original Instructions on how to be a human being, which describe our true identity as humans. It is the spirit in each of us that carries the memory of our Original Instructions and each of our specific identities, like nature itself.

We should begin with Young People of all cultures, preparing them and teaching them based on our traditions, how to have a sacred relationship with the Earth. Mentorship by the Elders and Knowledge Keepers can support our Children in knowing their identity and feeling the land. Knowledge Keepers can lead by creating Earth-centred education approaches, including rites of passage and ancient approaches of connecting to the land.

In their rite of passage to adulthood, Youth become connected to the land, the original Mother and teacher for us all. They find their own identity and purpose by going into ancient ceremonies, guided and led by the Grandmothers and Elders.

A boy becomes a man, giving of himself by fasting for four days, seeking a vision or dream on the land, that will give him his purpose and meaning in life. It is true that all men must be initiated by Woman to understand life's sacredness. A Young man must seek a vision for himself on a Vision Quest and be initiated by Mother Earth.

The Young girls who have just begun to bleed for the first time are brought to the Grandmothers, who provide sacred ceremony and instruction for them on their responsibilities as sacred life givers and water carriers, and how to honour and take care of themselves as women.

No human being can ever tell another what their identity should be. Each person needs to make their journey to the land, to feel their own spirit, and find their own identity. Only once that journey has been made will one love themselves as they are in how they identify.

Change is paramount now – we cannot wait much longer. We must find this spirit of working together within the diversity of the human family. Collectively, there is the necessary knowledge available that can enable change in our relationships with each other and our relationship with the land.



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We need to fully support and establish our own fully autonomous places of higher learning, led by the Knowledge Keepers of our Nations. There needs to be an investment in Indigenous infrastructures where we create the environment for the Knowledge Keepers who are fluent in the language and rooted in the ceremonies of our people to do their work with Young People: gathering, seeking direction in a ceremonial context, and offering vision and frameworks for climate solutions. Ancestral Sacred Lodges, places of learning and healing, should be supported. They can offer an Indigenous perspective on having a sacred relationship with the land.

The Elders encourage us to be guided by natural laws and to work together as brothers and sisters from all colours, faiths, religions, and traditions of the human family, to ensure a better future for our Children and the next generations. Natural laws and forces of nature are self-enforcing, more powerful than any human laws we could possibly create. Every act of kindness sets off a chain reaction with the powers of nature that are in support of life.

Our approach to seeking direction is to begin in a ceremonial context. Our dreams and visions continue to guide us to live in balance with all of Creation. The National Turtle Lodge Council of Elders and Knowledge Keepers will be called together again soon to discuss the issues of climate change and the health and well-being of our Children, to seek further spiritual guidance and offer direction on solutions.

We all have a responsibility to become a voice of Spirit, a voice of the land. Nature shows us it is the principle of working together with diverse approaches, based on sacred values and natural laws that keep the balance. Let the land, which is full of the spirit of life, be our connection and the foundation of our new world.