



# An Open Letter from Indigenous Peoples to Indigenous Peoples in Brazil on Surviving COVID-19



PORTUGUESE

SPANISH

*Preface by* **Eliane Potiguara**

What a joy to receive this Open Letter,  
this Manifesto of Solidarity from  
great Peoples of the North!

Indigenous Peoples have never been primitive as some have declared, neither "illiterate", nor without education, lifeways, customs, spirituality and literature. The original peoples of the planet, with our technology, survive to this day despite the genocide implanted upon us. The ancestral force is the immeasurable spring of life. For the millionth time we, Indigenous Peoples, continue to show that since the beginning of civilization, we are distinguished Peoples, with different ways of being, existing and thinking. Placed here by the Creator thousands of years ago the first Indigenous civilization knew how to distribute resources and food, with defined roles shared among men, women, children and elders, and with great traditions and philosophical knowledge.

The great forests like the Amazon, the Great Lakes, the great mountains, the vast plains, the fast rivers... I could continue here describing every topography of this wonderful planet... all that were placed here by the existential providence of the Great Creator. Today all are threatened by the hands that control money, by rampant and competitive capitalism. But we are here! My grandmother, an Indigenous Potiguara woman of great wisdom, big breasts and a fantastic entrepreneurial intelligence, told me that from one banana she made a thousand. Sounds like a miracle, doesn't it? But no! It was the ancestral forces and the traditional culture of her parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and great-great-grandparents that inspired her to save an entire Potiguara family and their lands so as not to be slaves or be murdered like her father, Chico Solón, in Paraíba, north of the country.

**My brothers and sisters, we share this ancestral knowledge!**

In this document, we share ideas that can create a new world by the simple facts, like that the original societies cook by the campfire, use the same place to warm our relatives during the night, and to perform our ceremonies. Other Peoples gather for their Powwows, while some reunite to dance the Toré, for example, summoning their Creator, honoring their habitat or expressing gratitude for life, gratitude for the right to live a simple life, as simple men and women of pure hearts and souls devoid of the ego of explorers, the

blood or others on their hands, devoid of consumerism and materialism.

We are witnessing that the so-called World Order of the great powers failing economically, philosophically, and physically. The COVID-19 pandemic is a testimony to this. We have received this Open Letter from our brothers and sisters of the North with gratitude. It is a letter of solidarity and respect. It is also a testimony to the fact that since the origins of the world we have been connected, and we will continue to exist that way since the origins of the world we have been connected, and we will continue to exist that way.



Dear relatives, receive this letter with love  
and gratitude. Thank you all!

*January, 2021*

**Dearest Indigenous Brothers and Sisters in Brazil,**

Let the words of this Open Letter to you be a testament to the love and concern that we have for one another during the uncertain times of this pandemic that is spreading through our territories and sickening and killing our people. The COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic has been with us for nearly one year and has taken a terrible toll on Indigenous communities in our part of the world. Some have fared better than others.

As we think about its impacts upon us and our communities, it's important to remember the big picture that we are all a part of. This virus has not been selective in its damaging effects, although it is clear that it has harmed some groups more than others. It has spread among nearly all the nations of the world creating a firestorm of death, sickness, and lasting complications for some who have recovered from the virus; it has led to a global economic collapse that has forced millions to lose employment, their homes, and their lives; it is forcing all us to live in self-isolation from friends, family, and loved ones. It has brought about a dramatic increase in mental health problems that have led to an explosion of suicide, hopelessness, and fear. Even the so-called rich, first world nations are suffering as the virus has now launched its second wave.



Through all of this, we have heard of your struggles through the organization, Cultural Survival, which has informed us of what has been happening in your communities. We are a small group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous mental health workers, clinicians, cultural specialists, human rights advocates and university professors. Several of us are members of different Indigenous Peoples in North America. Each of us has specialized training, knowledge, and experience that we hope may be helpful to you and your communities. We are your Indigenous relatives and allies from the North who have assembled to respectfully send you our greetings and words of hope as we all struggle with the harms brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We feel it is important to share what we know about COVID-19. It is a member of the Coronavirus family. Coronaviruses are called Corona because Corona means “crown.” And, when the virus is examined under a microscope it looks like there is a crown at the top of the virus. Western scientists tell us that Coronaviruses have been around for centuries. The older forms of the disease have been much milder, generally causing only slight respiratory symptoms such as common colds. Some Coronaviruses affect only people while others infect animals. However, some Coronaviruses can “jump” from animals to people and cause serious complications. The current coronavirus is a new (novel) disease that has jumped from an animal to humans. It is an aggressive virus that causes severe illness and death for many vulnerable people, while others do not get symptoms or seriously ill. It is spread through the droplets of an infected person when they speak, cough or sneeze. The droplets can travel up to six feet or more, which is why wearing a facial mask, covering both nose and mouth, and distancing at least 6 feet from one another is important. Washing your hands and disinfecting door knobs and surfaces we come in contact with is necessary because the infected droplets of the Coronavirus land on surfaces and can infect those who touch them. Very recently, vaccines have been developed to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus, which is good news. However, when and which Indigenous communities will actually get the vaccine remains to be seen.





When this current pandemic passes it will be a time for people to celebrate and go back to living a normal life. But we must be ever on alert for the next epidemic or pandemic. Scientists are already warning us that there will be more diseases like this in the future and we must be prepared. The rise in epidemics and pandemics have been traced to human encroachment and destruction of wildland habitats which increases contact between humans and wild animals; an increasing human population which makes the transmission of disease between humans much easier; the growth of global domestic livestock (animals) that are raised in unsanitary corporate animal factories that spawn disease, but are used for human consumption; and a rapidly changing climate, each in their own way a part

of the colonial crucible which provides fuel for the next dangerous infectious outbreaks.

We are thinking of you and wish to share not only our concerns, but also our belief that through our collective actions and common alliances to protect our people, lands, and cultural knowledge, we will overcome this pandemic and be prepared for the next. Each of us has been involved and committed to helping to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our own lives and communities. We believe that what we share here may help you to continue successfully coping and responding to this pandemic to lessen its damaging effects. Our intention is to let you know what we have been doing to change the course of the disease and the damage that it is causing among our Peoples. We hope that you accept our sincere offer and message. We share our experiences in the spirit of kinship, with compassion and love.

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## | An Indigenous Pandemic History

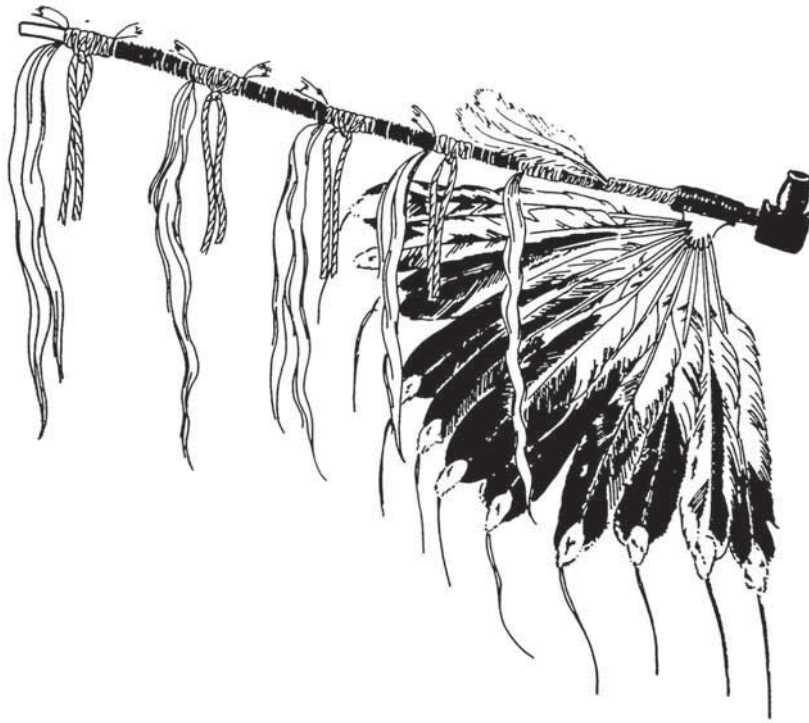


Infectious diseases did not exist among our ethnic groups prior to the European invasions into our homelands. Because of the lack of infectious diseases among our peoples, we did not develop widespread immunity to the European diseases. It is estimated that there have been as many as 93 serious epidemics and pandemics of European pathogens (European infectious diseases) spread among North American Indians from the early sixteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. Among the diseases are smallpox, measles, the bubonic plague, cholera, typhoid, scarlet fever, diphtheria, mumps, whooping cough, colds, pneumonia, influenza and respiratory diseases. Before 1492 there were at least 60.5 million Indigenous Peoples in the Americas. Between 1492 and 1600 it is estimated that 55 million (or 90 percent) of our people had been wiped out by European diseases and violence. A recent study published in 2019 says that the huge population decline of Native Americans caused a reduction in land use by Indigenous Peoples and contributed to the global cooling trend or “little ice age.”

European diseases were spread among our people in different ways. Some were spread accidentally and others deliberately. In the 1760s, British colonists deliberately gave smallpox infected blankets to Indians in order to “reduce them” in number. During the early 1800s, smallpox vaccination was denied to certain indigenous village by the US federal government. It wasn't until 1832 that the U.S. began to offer vaccinations to certain ethnic groups. By this time millions had already died.

Because of the mistrust of the U.S. government due to many years of abuse, even Tribes that were offered smallpox vaccinations did not accept them for fear that, coming from their oppressors, it would do them more harm than good. In the past, when Indigenous children were forcibly taken from our communities by the federal government or by religious missionaries, they were forced into confined, small, poorly ventilated classrooms and sleeping areas where they spread infectious diseases to one another and ended up very ill or dead.

European disease took a tremendous toll on the mental health of Indigenous Peoples. One of our authors, Lianna Costantino a Cherokee woman and mental health specialist Indian says “for us Cherokee people, there was another time when we were dying from European diseases. We perished at such a horrific rate that some of our medicine people took their own lives. They were devastated, feeling that their medicine was no longer working. Since taking one’s own life is contrary to our Cherokee way of life, you can imagine how serious the situation was. But, because we are very resilient Peoples, some of us isolated ourselves, prayed and took care of each other and later on some of us later became western medical doctors.”



The death of Indigenous People due to European diseases continues. Diseases such as depression, obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer, and alcoholism, which are often referred to as non-communicable diseases, have also spread widely among our Peoples and have made us sick, vulnerable to contagious diseases such as COVID-19, and have caused a substantial amount of premature death. These non-communicable diseases are new (novel) diseases among Indigenous Peoples since we did not have them before colonialism and its settlers entered our territories.







## Postcolonial Trauma and Memory Work

The connection between colonialism and trauma is deep-rooted. In this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is up to us to transmit our experiences and tell our stories of how the pandemic has and is affecting us. We must openly chronicle what settler governments did or did not do for us in our time of need, what we asked of them, and how they responded. As Indigenous Peoples, we have always had to fight to get the world to acknowledge the violence of colonialism and its destruction of our people, lands, and way of life. It is important that we engage in memory work to tell our stories.

We must explore the past through our ethnic, personal and community memories, telling others of what has happened to us, as we have had to bear the weight of the colonial crucible. Trauma has led our people to disconnect, forget, and normalize the diseases and ill health within communities. Remembering offers us a time and space to share the entanglements of our traumatic past, while at the same time, our insistence on telling our stories means that our oppressors and the bystanders have no choice but to see, hear, and acknowledge their complicity in our suffering. Restoring balance means understanding the processes by which historical trauma, oppression, and colonization manifest today. Recovery of our historical memory is linked to ancestral strength and is critical to restoring our physical and emotional balance and well-being.

The trauma brought on by over 500 years of abuse and passed down through/across generations is alive today. Since healing is historically connected to traditional ceremonies, sacred land spaces, and community, for many of us who have lost a lot of our ceremonials, there has been little opportunity to repair the damage of this historical trauma due to the banning of our healing ceremonies. To protect themselves, our ancestors hid their ways and their knowledge. In spite of this, we, Indigenous Peoples, hold onto who we are and whatever ways we can, even if this has meant guarding just a small piece of the basket. We never choose assimilation as a life path. Instead we fight to survive as ethnical people. We bring our ceremonies or pieces of them, with us into the present and forward toward the future. Ancestral strength is alive and well in many of our Indigenous communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected each of us who are writing this letter. Many of us have lost very close relatives and family members. Many of us have been unable to see our elders, children, parents, sisters and brothers, and other relatives and loved ones during this pandemic. Most of us have not been able to visit and support our people when they have become ill from COVID-19 or other diseases. Most of us have not been able return to our homelands following the deaths of our loved ones and friends, which means that most of us have not been able to attend funerals or to be a part of the traditional burial practices of our communities.

One author, Jim Wikel, shares the following story to let you know what is happening in his own life and Indigenous community:

“In late April 2020, my aunt made her journey. There would be no funeral services because of COVID-19 and we could not practice our traditional funerary practices in which the one who has made their journey is brought to our community building on our ceremonial grounds. Normally, the body lies in state for three days and three nights while a fire is kept burning outside. During this time, songs are sung, women prepare meals, and family members take turns sitting with the loved one who has made their journey. On the third night, a meal is prepared for all who are gathered, and a plate is set for the one who has made their journey. The plate is left out all that night. Because of COVID-19, our knowledge keepers decided to cancel all of the remaining activities in our ceremonial calendar. They issued instructions for us to conduct our ceremonies individually and at home. “ 'Do the best you can do with what you know'. These words are the last line in our Ganohonyohk, our Thanksgiving Address. On the third night of my auntie’s passing, I prepared a meal and set a plate for her. Prior to preparing the meal, I offered tobacco and said one of the speeches that are spoken when someone makes their journey. After I had the meal, I burned cedar. I then went to bed knowing that I had honoured my auntie. I had done the best I could do with what I knew.”



Another author, Michael Yellow Bird, says that during this pandemic, he has lost several very close relatives from his two ethnical communities and was not been able to visit with them when they were ill or attend their traditional burial ceremonies:

“I lost a very close uncle, two female relatives, a grandmother, and several others have become ill but thankfully have recovered. I grew up with my younger relatives in our Tribal community and have good memories of them. My grandmother passed on April 20, 2020. She did not die from COVID-19 but she died during the pandemic. She was 101 years old and very healthy, but died from an accident. Her Arikara (Indian) name is Ste Sta Ka Ta which means “Yellow Corn Woman.” She was a child of our traditional hereditary Arikara chief. When she died she took with her a tremendous amount of knowledge and wisdom. Only a very few of our large extended family were able to attend her funeral and no traditional burial rites were able to be held on her behalf.”



## The Vision



We believe that Indigenous Peoples from all over the world can come together to help one another to overcome the present pandemic and prepare for future epidemics and pandemics. Our ancestors' wisdom, prophecies, and teachings have always given us what we need to survive an uncertain future. It is necessary for us to increase our understanding of the failures of Western ideologies and lifestyles, to develop a greater ability to walk and navigate between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds, and to work together to create a global ethos where Indigenous values, beliefs, ways of knowing, and ethics are embraced, valued, and realized. We believe that the crises of the COVID-19 pandemic, while destructive and demoralizing, offer us an opportunity to come to strengthen our relationships with Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples so we can contribute our knowledge and wisdom with others in the hopes of making the world a better place.

Indigenous Peoples recognize that all things are connected. If the bees disappear tomorrow, we will surely follow soon after. But if people were to disappear from the Earth tomorrow, the other creatures inhabiting the planet would thrive. What does this tell us? At one point, all beings thrived together. Then, something happened to create a disconnect between the people we now consider to be "Indigenous" and the people who are not; the latter began living in disharmony with everything around them.

We agree that, as Indigenous Peoples, we must work to expand our perspectives as individuals and collectivities and share the insights we gain by expanding our fields of vision. The world needs our collective values to understand that everything is connected. We all depend on one another. We all are one. To postpone the end of the world, as one of your wise men says, we need to see ourselves as a community. To postpone the end of the world, to hold up the sky, as Davi Kopenawa and Ailton Krenak say, we must see ourselves unified and of one mind.





## The Prophecies

One of our greatest strengths as Indigenous Peoples are our prophecies. Our ancestors predicted the calamities that we have faced and overcome. It is important to remember the visions and the knowledge that our Peoples have gained from our prophecies. The Cherokees from the Southeastern Woodlands of the United States tell a story of the frog who swallowed the sun. The people came together with their drums and frightened off the frog so the sun would return. The frog is not the villain; he is only doing what the frog does. This story tells us to pay attention to our waters because amphibians are the barometers of what is happening with our waters. Our traditions chart ways to manage difficulties, like paying attention to the messages that frogs and other beings tell us.

The Arikara tell an ancient story of how the killing of a beautiful snake by two foolish boys from the Tribe brought calamity, death, and destruction upon the people. When the snake nation learned that the foolish boys had killed their beloved, beautiful snake they attacked the Arikara. A deadly battle broke out between the Arikara people and the snakes. When it was finally over many people had been killed and injured, all because of the behavior of the foolish boys. The story teaches that mindless destruction of any form of life has dire consequences for all people. The Arikara have prophesied that the continued foolish behavior of people as they destroy the lands, animals, waters, forests, and plants will result in the collapse of human societies around the world.



Many Indigenous Peoples believe that prophesies are connected to our ancient memories through our DNA that has been passed down to us from our ancestors. Indigenous midwives have many stories of blood memory, rebirth, regeneration, transformation, and of water being our first environment and first medicine. Medicine people often have a blood memory of place as well: knowledge that says, “We have never lived here,” or “Yes, we have always lived here. We belong here. The plants, the animals, the stars are familiar and will work with us. They have heard our language before.”

Midwives, who are often midwives in death as well, are intimately aware of the similarities between the experiences of birth and death. Both involve travelling from one form of existence to another through a “tunnel”, towards the light and into the loving arms of family. Birth and death can be uncomfortable, even painful journeys until the travelers arrive at their destinations, often in quite different and alien forms. Indigenous Peoples acknowledge both as journeys towards rebirth. They are not to be feared. Many stories tell us about these journeys. They teach us that, even when we must succumb to something like COVID-19, it is not the end. Remembering this can be healing too.

Our mothers’ blood creates connections that take every single one of us back to the First Mother. Think about it. You had a mother. She had a mother. Her mother must have had a mother, or she wouldn't have existed. These connections extend all the way back to the very

first mother. All the way back. Therefore, in a sense, we all share the same blood. This is why we say, "We are all related."

Many people have discussed this prophecy and considered how all people have failed in our responsibilities to the Earth. We Indigenous Peoples have done our best to fulfill our responsibilities, but others have made that difficult or impossible. And when the white people found their way back, the Hopi people noticed that they carried a cross, but it was no longer encircled by the Great Spirit. They knew their white brothers and sisters had lost their way. This prophecy has been discussed around the world as an example of our former connection to all Peoples, our responsibility to one another and our need to reconnect.

You, Native People of Amazonia, of the Cerrado, of Brazil's northeast and south, Watu people and Abya Yala relatives, know that the Land-without-Evil is waiting for us. The primeval Turtle that fell from the tree will always give us directions to find our way. The Hummingbird, who brings us hope and teaches us how to take care of our people, has promised to never leave us. Because of our ancestors, the Thunder Beings, as Guarani wisdom teaches, have said:





“Our children and we will be reborn by the Earth, and in this reborn, we will provide Soul-Words by the ground walking sounds will sing lives, each their own tone. After the fusion of space and the dawn of new time, I will make the Soul-Words circulate again in the bones of those who stand, and the souls become incarnate again, says our First Father, Tupā. When this happens, Matis, our first mother, will be born in the heart of the stranger, and the first

adorned again will rise up in the Earthly dwelling for all its length.”



We have heard of Parinai’a, the A’uwẽ-Xavante wapté pre-initiate boys who transformed themselves to create all things that A’uwẽ-Xavante know: they transformed themselves to create dogs, jaguars, ants and honey bees and all foods: fish, potatoes, babaçu, nuts, macauba coconuts. They brought everything into being. Like Parinai’a, through transformation, we Indigenous people adapt and persist. Like those ancestors, we shall remain.

Our Elders tell us stories of rebirth, regeneration and transformation. These stories teach us many things. They teach us to educate all members of our communities to understand the many signs that signal the collapse of Western society. They remind us that we should be more cautious than ever in our desire to be part of this system. The Annishinabe of North American knew of a Windigo, a cannibalistic spirit driven by greed, excess, and selfish consumption. Villaged People people knew of this spirit and had ceremonies so the Windigo did not grow and spread.



When the Europeans came onto this continent, the greedy Windigo flourished.



*"Ojibwe cosmos" Anishinaabe People*

A Lakota prophecy tells of the Eagle and the Condor. These great birds represent an awakening of the people and a coming together of the north and the south. We saw this at Standing Rock, South Dakota when our Peoples from north and south came together to protest an oil pipeline through Lakota lands. The Condor is also said to represent Indigenous people and the heart. The Eagle stands for Europeans and the mind. This is a story of connection and support. It reminds us of the importance of standing together, even when it seems we are opposed. It also reminds us that it is important to develop an ability to intelligently and critically navigate

between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds. By doing this we are able to maintain our Indigenous identity and our sovereignty as Peoples.

“When a cat begins to bark,” says Tom Belt, a Cherokee Elder and first language speaker, “it is fundamentally no longer a cat.” The Cherokee warn those who encounter shape shifting animals in the woods, like bears or panthers, that if they live too long with the animal they encounter, they will begin to take on the natures of those animals. After a point, when they attempt to return to their human villages, they will die.





## Memorable Acts of Resistance



[https://youtu.be/kWMHiwdbM\\_Q](https://youtu.be/kWMHiwdbM_Q)

The National Constituent Assembly was marked by the defense of the Popular Amendment of the Indigenous United Nations 27 years ago. On September 4, 1987, the spokesman for the emerging Indigenous Movement made a historic speech that managed to reverse the anti-indigenous political situation in that legislature of the Brazilian National Congress. The strong pronouncement by Ailton Krenak, with a spirit of mourning, was a decisive act for the approval of articles 231 and 232 of the 1988 Federal Constitution by the constituent parliamentarians.

Like you, we, Indigenous Peoples living in the north have been the victims of invasion, genocide and abuse. We have suffered many egregious and inhumane acts from our oppressors. We share a common history with you. Since the invasions of Christopher Columbus,

Pedro Álvares Cabral, and other Europeans more than 500 years ago, our numbers have thinned, as have the size of our lands, waters, and forests. Unfortunately, pandemics and epidemics of disease are nothing new to us.

It is important that we engage in actions to resist the spread of COVID-19 into our communities by our own people and outsiders. We must engage in actions to live, survive, and overcome. There have been many great Indigenous warriors, teachers, intellectuals, and political and spiritual leaders among our many Tribes. We heard of some of your great heroes, such as Caramuru, Tapuios, Emboabas, Manaos, Ajuricaba, the warrior, the Cabanagem. We remember the treaties of peace that we built and that were often disregarded by the colonists. We remember that in order to survive and resist, we transformed the Reduções into the Retomadas policies that reduced and stole our lands.

It is good to remember the milenar Guarani, and other parentes, resistance against the bandeirantes that crossed the borders between what are today distinct nation states. The small and beautiful Guarani villages in the monstrous city of Sao Paulo are an example of Indigenous force, persistence and the will to survive.

More recent testaments to Indigenous Brazilians' steadfast persistence and will to resist the forces of colonization are the tenacity of the beloved Mario Juruna, with his cassette recorder demanding

accountability from the non-indigenous leaders; the courageous speech of Ailton Krenak in the 1988 Constitutional Assembly; the fearless sister Tuira Mebengokrê, who wielded her machete in the face of Eletronorte's representative as she cried out:

"Government will not divide us!"; The greatness of the beloved Chief Raoni; the pacifist writings of Daniel Munduruku and the intelligent young warriors who are now using art, media and music; they are all inspiring examples. This document honors your giant ancestors and builds the ancestry of tomorrow.





Acts of Healing

Remember, we, Indigenous and First Nations, are a resilient Peoples. We have survived colonization, forced assimilation, genocide, and epidemics in the past. Our cultures, our ceremonies, our medicines, our languages, and being in community have contributed to survival. We still have these resources to draw on. They are alive in us, in our genetic memories, in our Elders. We are DNA-Descendant Now Ancestors. We will live through these times because we have lived through times like this in the past.

Well-being comes from connection, meaning, and aiming to achieve togetherness and we can still do this, but must do it by physically distancing, wearing facial masks, and staying home more often than we like. Contemplative practices such as meditation, prayer, and ceremony are healing and help to prevent depression and anxiety. Awakening instinctual knowing and insight helps us find our way, connect with our felt sense of connection to ourselves, others, and the larger universe--all things. This is healing and also preventative for depression and anxiety.

The Art as Healing workshop series, this past spring, led community members through an eight-week journey to find the wisdom of a traditional story by developing their own stories. Twelve teenagers, adults, and Elders explored how ancient wisdom applies directly to what they are facing in their lives today. Characters in the stories included a messenger goose that loses her flock, a palm-tree daughter who has land

and animal allies, and a grandmother who sheds light on coyote stories. Wisdom gained included remembering who you are, that no one is ever truly gone, life is about transformation, bringing compassion into the fight, and having a good and happy life.

We need to remember our medicines. In North America, we use tobacco, cedar, sweetgrass, sage, peyote, and many other medicines that our Mother Earth has given us. Beyond their medicinal benefits, many Indigenous plants were once a staple of our diet. Today, Indigenous plants are central to efforts to improve dietary health for our current generations. In this very real sense wild foods and traditional farming crops are medicine. For many of us, water is our first medicine. It was our first environment and it carries other medicines to us in tea and through us in blood. There is an entire Indigenous science involved in that.

Participate in ceremony, as much as you can. Even if the ceremonies cannot be held communally in person, put them through the best you can on your own. Make a sacred space in your home or on the land. Pray and meditate in your own way.

Sing your songs and say your prayers, and remember the words of your ancestors and wisdom keepers. Some Nations have online language learning resources. The spirits of the land you live on do not understand colonizers' languages. They speak the languages of Indigenous ancestors who have always inhabited them.





If you can, grow a garden. Now is the perfect opportunity to grow traditional foods. Gardening is proven to be a therapeutic exercise, good for the body, mind, and spirit.

Create and nurture a relationship with the Earth you live upon, the sky and stars above you, the plants, waters and animals around you. They all have things to teach to those who know how to listen. Indigenous people have a deep knowledge of and connection to place.

Get plenty of exercise. Get outdoors, put your feet on the Earth, walk, run, breath in the fresh air, and absorb



the healing rays of the sun which are restorative and helpful in combating depression. These are medicines as well. Research shows that Vitamin D may help prevent or lessen the effects of COVID-19. The sun helps our body manufacture Vitamin D. But it is important to not overexpose yourself to the sun.

Check in on the Elders by phone, text, or visit them from a safe physically distanced space. Make sure that you and they are wearing facial masks. Talk with them, ask them to teach you what they know or tell you a story. Our elders are special and unique treasures.

Use humor, laugh, smile, make pleasant positive thoughts in your mind and conversation with those in your home or when you talk on the phone. Whenever Indigenous Peoples gather there is always much laughter. Laughter is medicine.

Every Indigenous language has a word, or several words, for the idea of being at peace, being balanced, being in harmony. Learn those words, speak them, learn how they apply to nature, and apply them to your own life.

Practice being grateful. Many of our ceremonies are really celebrations of thanksgiving. Everyday make a list of five things that you are grateful for. Practice being grateful by being kind and compassionate. If you know

how to say "thank you" in your language, say it many times each day.

Stay connected with your ancestors. Oglala Lakota Olympic winner, Billy Mills, credits winning the 1964 10,000 meters gold medal to his ancestral connection with his father who died when he was twelve. His presence manifested when Billy was running the race. Ancestral self-awareness is healing.



## Closing

There is an opportunity to change the course of history by surviving and thriving during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are now in position to envision a new Indigenous world, one that is even more resilient, courageous, and determined to survive. We envision and foresee a world where Indigenous Peoples join the ancient and contemporary practices to meet and overcome the challenges that lay ahead. We have done it before and we can do it again.

Indigenous Peoples survived for much longer than the colonized world has existed. We know how to meet



hardship and adjust to what is needed to survive. Indigenous People survive against all odds. We have always endured because of our great resilience. The things we use to survive are contemplative practices, arts-- singing, dancing, painting, drawing, ceremony. These things are all connected to community.

We find that the Indigenous communities that have fared the best during the COVID-19 pandemic have closed off their communities to outsiders and engaged in public health protocols that have proven to prevent the spread of the virus: (1) Indigenous Peoples who wear protective facial masks are much less likely to contract the virus; (2) Those that thoroughly wash their hands when they go outside of their homes and when they return home; (3) Those that practice physically distancing from one another at least six feet had less chance of being infected. However, we now know that the droplets from a person who is infected with COVID-19 can travel as far as 26 feet if an individual has a strong cough or sneeze, which is why facial masks are so important to wear all of the time; (4) Those that are avoiding gatherings with others are less likely to get COVID-19, since person-to-person contact is a main way that the disease spread; (5) Those that clean and disinfect their living spaces are more protected from the virus. It is very important to be vigilant about cleaning. This must be done whenever one goes outside the home to a new space or if someone drops by to visit; and finally (6), although it is very difficult on our emotions and well-being, it is very important that



everyone stays home unless it is absolutely necessary to leave.

At this time, we wish you the best of health, abundance, happiness, and a fierceness to survive this pandemic and those that may follow. We will keep you in our thoughts as we struggle through these challenging times, remembering that we are all in this together, and that will do whatever we can to be of service and be supportive to you.

## About the Authors

ChiiRA ti Iditat ti Inani (Greetings my sisters and my brothers). My name is **Michael Yellow Bird**. My Arikara name is NeshunNuunat' Taawaay Ti Naahuun' (Chief Among Many). I am Dean and Professor of the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB, Canada. I am an enrolled member of the Three Affiliated Tribes (Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara) from the state of North Dakota, USA. My work focuses on decolonization, Indigenous contemplative and mindfulness approaches, and ancestral health.

Nya;weh sgeno swagegoh (Greetings I am grateful for all of you). My English name is **Jim Wikel**. Hah No Nigoha Esh ni giyaso (My name is Hah no Nigahoa Esh, His Mind Is Changing). Otahyoni niwag^esyao^de: Wolf Is my clan) Onodowa^ga:^ Gayogoho:no^ ni Ganiwyo'geho:weh niwagohwej^ode

(Seneca-Cayuga Nation of Oklahoma is my Nation). I come from The Haudenosaunee (People of The Longhouse) Confederacy, known as The Iroquois Confederacy or The Six Nations.

Siyo! Lianna Costantino dagwado' nole Tsitsalagi. **ᑭᑭ!** Lianna Costantino **ᑭᑭᑭᑭ ᑭᑭ ᑭᑭᑭᑭ**. Hello! My name is **Lianna Costantino** and I'm a citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. I'm a grandmother and a longtime advocate for Indigenous sovereignty and health. I'm a Cherokee storyteller and a street medic. I wish all of us peace, equity, harmony and happiness.

My name is **Renda Dionne Madrigal**. I am Turtle Mountain Chippewa and married into the Cahuilla Tribe. I am a Psychologist, Registered Drama Therapist, Mindfulness Facilitator, author and storyteller. My work integrates mindfulness, somatic experiencing (body based), and creative arts (narrative, drama therapy, and storytelling) as healing modalities aimed at remembering our humanity.

My name is **Eliane Potiguara** of the Potiguara Peoples in Brazil. I am a writer, poet, teacher, and an Education specialist. I am the founder of the first organization of Indigenous women, GRUMIN / Indigenous Women for Education Group (1988). I am the Ambassador of Peace for the Circle of Ambassadors of France and Switzerland. In 2014 received the Title of "Knight of the Order of Cultural Merit" from the Brazilian government. I am the author of HALF FACE, HALF

MASK (2004). In 2019, I won the the Pen CLUB of England Award and the Free Expression Prize.

## Editor

My name is **Laura Rea Graham**. I am a non-Indigenous anthropologist, filmmaker and partner in the Indigenous movement for rights and respect. I have lived and studied with the A'uwẽ-Xavante people of Brazil for many years, and more recently with Wayuu of Venezuela. I am Professor of Anthropology at the University of Iowa, President-elect of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America and serve on the Cultural Survival board of directors.

## Coordinator

My name is **Edson Krenak** from the Krenak Naknanuk Peoples of the Watu, the place of my ancestors in Brazil. Vanuire Village is the home of my relatives. My role is to translate and help to distribute this document. I also participated in all sessions where our relatives and friends responsible for this document discussed and prepared. Many important names are not here because they did not want to be mentioned here, but their wisdom and sympathy are embedded in the document.

## Illustrator



My name is **Mauricio Negro**. I am a visual artist, writer, designer, researcher, project coordinator and cultural manager. After more than thirty years of career, my production is marked by the socio-environmental theme, by the non-Eurocentric visual approaches of traditional indigenous stories and contemporary poetics and above all by the Brazilian natural and cultural diversity. Besides being a frequent collaborator, I am an ally in defense of indigenous perspectives.

## Publisher

**Cultural Survival** is an Indigenous-led NGO and U.S. registered non-profit that advocates for Indigenous Peoples' rights and supports Indigenous communities' self-determination, cultures, and political resilience, since 1972. For almost 50 years, Cultural Survival has partnered with Indigenous communities to advance Indigenous Peoples' rights and cultures worldwide. We envision a future that respects and honors Indigenous Peoples' inherent rights and dynamic cultures, deeply and richly interwoven in lands, languages, spiritual traditions, and artistic expression, rooted in self-determination and self-governance.



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