

## **Closing Statement by Cormac Cullinan, President**

### **International Rights of Nature Tribunal**

Paris, France



Ladies and Gentlemen,

I think you will all agree with me that over these last two days we have been extraordinarily fortunate to participate in these proceedings. These proceedings will, we hope, prove not only to have been extraordinary in terms of what we have heard and the evidence that has been led but also to be historic.

#### **Formal establishment of truly international Tribunal**

The **Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth**, which as you heard was approved in Cochabamba, Bolivia in 2010, has created a manifesto for earth justice for organizations and people all over the world. What has happened here today and yesterday has been the consolidation of that effort by the establishment of the Tribunal – the formal establishment the Tribunal because it already existed – by the People’s Convention which entered into force yesterday. This represents a significant step forward because it is an example to people everywhere how, when the governments of the world failed, we can step forward as people and begin to create the world that we want to see. We can create People’s institutions; we can enter into agreements ourselves and begin to create the future that we want.

More than 80 people from many different countries of the world have participated in these proceedings as judges, as experts, as presenters, as prosecutors, etc. So I think we can safely say that this is a truly international tribunal.

**Systemic problems require systemic responses** - “What befalls the earth, befalls the children of the earth.”

It has been wonderful to hear the stories from all over the world coming together. And what they have shown us, is that if you had any doubts about this before, we are facing systemic problems. We are facing deep-rooted problems in the dominant civilizations which need to be addressed. Roots which are not only to do with environmental degradation but which also affect issues of patriarchy and the military.

So the first point is inescapable. This is a systemic issue and the responses must be systemic.

Secondly, if anyone came here with any doubts about whether or not human rights and the rights of nature are compatible, I think that they must have be dispelled. Everybody has demonstrated that they are inseparable. As Chief Seattle is reported to have said so long ago:

“What befalls the Earth, befalls the children of the Earth.”

## **The evidence before the Tribunal and its findings**

And the evidence has been harrowing. We have all been through an emotional journey. Sometimes it has evoked anger, sometimes heartbreak and sorrow. We have heard about the attacks on the Defenders of the Earth and we have heard about the attacks on the Earth. Can you imagine how much deeper and intense this journey would have been if all our relations had been able to come here and testify? If the fish, and the birds, and the trees, and the creatures in the soil had been able to come here and tell us about how they are experiencing the assault on Mother Earth. If they had been able to talk about the destruction of their home, the poisoning of their children, and the extinction of their species.

The findings which flow from this evidence are damning. There is no doubt about it -we are experiencing systematic violations of the Rights of Mother Earth. Almost all beings on the planet are affected and almost every single article in the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth has been violated, as you have heard.

## **Judgements show the way forward**

So the judgements, of which you have heard a few, are intended to show the way forward. They are about holding people and organizations accountable – but they are also intended to point a path to the future. This is the direction in which we must head if we are going to allow Mother Earth to heal herself.

But many will say:

“But so what? You don’t have the power to enforce these judgements. You don’t have a police force; you don’t have prisons.”

Of course that thinking comes from the coercive mindset which dominates the planet; the belief that you can only enforce judgements by force. But that is not what we are trying to do. We are trying to show a way forward; a way forward which is so powerful that people all over the world will join behind it and say that has got to be a better way. That we will build a force by consensus which will drive these decisions into our society and change its fundamental norms.

The Tribunal and its decisions on the basis of the evidence of the people from around the world will strengthen the process of changing social norms. It will change what is acceptable. Many of the practices of which you have heard will no longer be acceptable in a few years’ time. And even less so in the next generation.

## **The power of people, life and love**

And what we also have on our side is, of course, the remarkable power of people, because one of the things that always makes me quite sure that we are doing the right things is when I look at the people around us. The people that are involved. The people whom we have

heard are passionate Earth Defenders, our witnesses; the experts. These are passionate, brave, wonderful, committed people who are changing the world and I salute them all.

We also have, of course, *life* on our side. Those mysterious wild forces that have brought our universe into existence, that have created the extraordinary diversity of life around us. Because our role as humanity must surely be to contribute our voices to the wonderful song of life, to the harmony of the universe that arises from our Earth and to play our role in promoting and strengthening the health and integrity of the whole.

And of course, we love this community of life. We are members of it. All of us in this room are involved in this work because of our attachment to the world, our love of nature, of those places that are special to us, of the animals and creatures that we grew up with. The power that flows from that love is impossible to conquer. That is what will keep us going and that is what will ensure that we triumph ultimately.

### **We must take responsibility for this Tribunal**

But we must be practical. If we are to create the reality that we want to see it will take organization. It will take solidarity. It will take building support for this Tribunal. This is a People's Tribunal; it is *your* Tribunal; it is *our* Tribunal. And we must take responsibility for making sure that it lives and grows in strength day by day. We must build local organizations that will bring cases. We must build regional forums so that we can have regional hearings throughout the world. We must find the funding to bring people together. And we must build support for the decisions of the Tribunal so that ultimately they carry enormous force because of the weight of people behind them.

On the first day, Casey Camp-Horinek mentioned that it was a good day. Nnimmo Bassey repeated that. I have been thinking about it. We have had two days of beautiful weather – hard to see in this room – and I think that they have been good days. Good days not only for us but good days for Mother Earth, good days for the birds and the fishes and the forest. Because what has been happening here is that you are seeing the emergence of an ecological society. You are seeing a shift, a reorientation of many people towards supporting the health, integrity and healing of the Earth. We are beginning the process, those of us from the industrialized nations, of learning once more about how to live in harmony with all of our relations. And I feel very encouraged by what has happened here over the last few days.

### **Thank you to all who made this possible**

I would like to end off by thanking those who made this possible. First of all, on behalf of the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature, I would like to thank our allies and co-hosts of this event – Attac France, NatureRights and End Ecocide on Earth.

I would also like to thank all members of the Tribunal, the Judges, our wonderful Earth Defenders Ramiro Alvira and Linda Sheehan, who have all given of their time and an enormous amount of preparation behind the scenes to be here and make this event happen.

There have been very many people involved in creating this event. It has been done with very little money but a huge amount of passion and energy from many people. There are too many

to mention all by name, but I would just like in particular to pay tribute to a group of women who have really been at the centre of making this happen: Natalia Greene of the Tribunal Secretariat, Osprey Orielle Lake, Linda Sheehan, Shannon Biggs, Samanta Novella, Valerie Cabanes and Robin Milam.

So ladies and gentleman we have embarked on an adventure. We weren't quite sure where it was going to lead but I have been completely moved by the events of the past few days. It feels like we have been on a roller coaster or a runaway train. Things have happened. We didn't anticipate many of these things. There has been an amazing power and energy in this room. And from the very first moment of the opening ceremony where we dropped into a deeper space, this room has generated an energy that has been quite extraordinary. It has taken us through the two days, through the passion, through the sorrow, through the tears. I am sure it is going to take us all into the future to do great things.

Thank you

More information may be found at:

<http://therightsofnature.org/rights-of-nature-tribunal-paris/>

<http://therightsofnature.org/cormac-cullinan-paris-tribunal/>