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ANDEAN SUMMIT: INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES FROM ARGENTINA, CHILE, PERU, BOLIVIA DECLARE UNITY IN FACE OF LITHIUM MINING ON INDIGENOUS LANDS

[El Moreno, January 23, 2025] Just over a year after the Argentinean government violently attacked Indigenous men, women, and children who were protesting lithium mining on their lands, over 200 Indigenous leaders from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Peru gathered in northern Argentina to find mutual support and declare shared resistance to lithium mining in Indigenous territories. This was during the first Andean Intercultural Summit of Communities Affected by Lithium Mining, held January 17-19, 2025 in the province of Jujuy, Argentina.

The Summit, held with the support of the Indian Law Resource Center, addressed the critical situation faced by communities in the so-called "lithium triangle", a transboundary area between Argentina, Bolivia and Chile, which constitutes the largest lithium reserve in the world. Delegates from each country, and Peru, expressed their deep concerns for the serious environmental, social and cultural impacts caused by lithium mining in their territories. The communities denounced significant impacts on their ancestral territories and water resources, especially highlighting the situation in the Argentine province of Jujuy, where recent constitutional changes have facilitated lithium extraction without guaranteeing free, prior, and informed consent of the affected communities, in violation of international law. Notably, officials from the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights also attended the summit, training participants on their human rights under international law.

Don Clemente Flores, one of the organizers of the event, explained, "We all represent Indigenous communities confronted daily with the destructive social and environmental impacts of lithium mining. We have all endured the violent efforts of state governments and mining companies to try to scare us and divide us."

Flores lives in the small Indigenous community of El Moreno, where the Summit was held. El Moreno is nestled in the foothills of the Andean mountains, at nearly 12,000 feet. Here, he explains, as with communities throughout the Lithium Triangle, mining companies have come onto Indigenous lands, meeting secretly with only a few families, and then declaring that the entire community has given their consent to mining operations. In fact, many express concerns about how these operations will affect their water supply, the natural habitat upon which their livestock graze, and the contamination of land upon which they and their children depend. "We have not, as a People, given our consent to these mines, but we are not being consulted, we cannot access the information we need to make informed decisions, and we are threatened for asking questions or speaking out. Still we continue fighting, and we continue in our territories."

In particular, community members expressed concern about the excessive water taken and contaminated in the lithium mining process. "For our Ayllus and Markas communities, water is worth more than lithium," said Pablo Salas, leader of the Ipokate Ayllu Lampa Puno community in Peru. Throughout this region, water is already scarce, yet governments have declined to protect watersheds from mining, giving multi-national mining companies unlimited access to fresh water sources in the face of the growing demand for lithium. Jimena Cruz Mamani, representative of the Council of Atacameño Peoples in Chile, asserted, "Indigenous communities refuse to be part of an energy transition that generates territorial dispossession, pollution and loss of water sources."

The Summit culminated with the collective adoption of the "Andean Summit Declaration," a document which was drafted and signed by all of the Indigenous delegations attending the Summit. It states, in part, "Indigenous peoples, in full exercise of our collective rights to self-determination and collective ownership of the lands under the possession of our communities, have absolute power to decide on any activity that affect, in one way or another, our communities, lands, territories and natural resources." The document denounces attempts by the mining industry to turn communities against one another and declares they will not be silenced, even in the face of threats, coercion or attempts at bribery.

The Declaration also directly addresses three primary actors involved in the extraction of lithium:

- **To national governments**, they demand the immediate titling of lands under the possession of Indigenous communities, rejecting any attempt to alter the original boundaries of ancestral lands. They demand that Indigenous communities be consulted in accordance with the highest standards of international law *prior* to the issuance of mining licenses, respecting consultation protocols developed by the communities themselves, and guaranteeing their right to self-determination and self-government.
- **To mining companies and countries interested in lithium extraction**, they demand strict compliance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the policies on Indigenous peoples of international financial institutions, such as those belonging to the World Bank Group and the Inter-American Development Bank Group. They further demand that mining companies refrain from any actions that violate Indigenous rights over their lands, territories and resources.
- **To the international community**, stand with Indigenous peoples in the absolute repudiation of any lithium mining activity that violates the collective rights of indigenous communities over their lands, territories and resources. Instead, with Indigenous participation, establish specific obligations under international law for the clear protection of indigenous rights in mining procedures and in environmental and social impact assessments.

The joint declaration further emphasizes the fundamental unity of the Andean peoples, declaring "We identify ourselves as a single Andean people, without any division established by border boundaries and/or direct or indirect affectation by lithium mining projects, we share the same

problems caused by mining and racism, and we will take joint actions for the protection of our Mother Earth Pachamama."

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The Indian Law Resource Center is a non-profit law and advocacy organization established and directed by Indigenous North and South Americans. The Center has offices in Helena, Montana and in Washington, DC. We provide legal assistance to Indian and Alaska Native nations and Indigenous communities working to protect their lands, resources, human rights, environment and cultural heritage. Our principal goal is the preservation and well-being of Indigenous nations and tribes across the Americas. For more information, visit:

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