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October 4, 2002

AN OPEN LETTER TO IUCN

To: Mr. Achim Steiner, Director General
World Conservation Union (IUCN)
Re: IUCN-ICMM Partnership on Mining and Biodiversity
Via e mail

Respectful Greetings Mr. Stienner,

The International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), an Indigenous NGO with United Nations Consultative Status since 1977, is a member of the World Conservation Union (IUCN). IITC was the first Indigenous organization to become a formal member of IUCN in 1986.

Since that time, IITC has participated in the World Conservation Congresses and other IUCN activities to the best of our capacity, given the financial constraints that sometimes affect us. We attended the last World Congress in Amman Jordan in October, 2000.

Over the years, we have seen a growing interest from IUCN in the participation of Indigenous Peoples' organizations. We also have appreciated many of the positions IUCN has taken which coincide with urgent concerns of Indigenous Peoples. These include, in recent years, support for the creation of a working group on Article 8(j) of the Convention on Biodiversity addressing traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples, as well positions regarding Climate Change and Persistent Organic Pollutants impacting subsistence food resources, to name a few.

That is why we were so greatly dismayed, and as you may have noticed, chose to sign on to the Indigenous Peoples Statement protesting IUCN's announcement of its partnership with the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM), "the global voice of the industry", during the WSSD in Johannesburg.

The IITC Board of Directors met from September 18 – 19, 2002 on the Ft. Belknap Indian Reservation in Montana, USA. Our Board members discussed at length their profound concerns about this development as an IUCN member organization. IITC's Board members found this initiative to be highly disturbing, as it implicates IITC as a IUCN member, and absolutely does not reflect our position. In fact, first of all, we respectfully request that you provide us with the documentation reflecting the opportunity we had to vote on this "partnership" initiative, which our representatives to recent IUCN World Congresses do not recall.

In our work at the United Nations and its specialized agencies, the IITC appreciates the importance of dialogue and discussion, as well as presenting challenges and in some

cases formal complaints, to address critical and unacceptable situations impacting our Peoples, including at times the actions of certain states and agencies.

But engaging in dialogue and presenting challenges is one thing, and entering into “partnerships” is entirely another. The mining industry, especially the major companies which make up the ICMM, have an appalling record of not only environmental destruction and contamination, but direct and egregious violations of Indigenous Peoples' rights around the world. Our Board meeting in Montana took place near the site of the Pegasus Gold Mine, an open pit heap leach mine which left, when it closed in 1998 after years of vehement community protests, an ongoing legacy of cyanine ground water contamination and irrevocable destruction of a Sacred Mountain.

This was noted by our Board members as they discussed the implications of this new “partnership” between IUCN and the Mining Industry. Several other IITC Board members and many of our member-affiliates have also been detrimentally, and in many cases, disastrously impacted by mining and other forms of non-sustainable resource extraction. We can not forget our primary role in representing the concerns of Indigenous communities which are impacted and threatened in this way.

While we do not doubt your sincerity in attempting to positively impact the behavior of this vastly destructive industry, we strongly believe that the creation of this formal “partnership” is step is far more likely to produce badly needed public relations advantages for the mining industry than significant changes in their actual conduct.

As IUCN members, we therefore must call upon IUCN to heed the call by Indigenous Peoples and to immediately rescind this partnership until more than promises and “signals” are offered by the mining industry that they plan to change their legacy of destruction of lands, waters and Peoples around the world. We affirm that entering into dialogue with mining companies, and as needed, challenging egregious practices with the goal of affecting real change, does not require entering into a formal “partnership” that implicates all of your members, including IITC.

The IITC Board of Directors IITC respectfully requests your timely response to our concerns so that we may consider them at our next Board meeting which will take place January 22-24, 2003. At that time we will revisit the situation, including assessing our continued membership in IUCN, based upon your response.

Thank you for considering our profound concerns, and the concerns of Indigenous Peoples from around the world on this critical matter,

Sincerely,

Andrea Carmen
IITC Executive Director