

Indigenous Voices on the Pandemic

Webinar | June 10th, 2020 | 11AM Pacific | 2PM Eastern | 7PM UK

Link to the webpage on TreeSisters with the full webinar (2hr runtime):

<https://treesisters.org/grow-yourself/indigenous-wisdom-for-the-earth>

Speakers:

Clare Dubois

Host

TreeSisters Founder and CEO

<https://treesisters.org/>

Jo Overton

Rosebud Sioux Tribe

Protect Native Elders Co-founder

<https://protectnativeelders.org/>

Member of the Sicangu Lakota (Rosebud Sioux) people

Link to their fundraiser: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/protect-native-elders>

Atossa Soltani

Founder and Board President of Amazon Watch

<https://amazonwatch.org/>

Amazon Emergency Fund, aiding many indigenous people living in the Amazon

<https://www.amazonemergencyfund.org/>

Patricia Gualinga

Globally-renowned Kichwa people of Sarayaku leader from the Ecuadorian Amazon

Bio: <https://amazonwatch.org/assets/files/bios/patricia-gualinga.pdf>

Jyoti (Jeneane Prevatt, PhD)

Center for Sacred Studies Founder, Grandmother Vision Keeper

<https://www.centerforsacredstudies.org/>

The Fountain Founder

<https://thefountain.earth/>

Promotes an economic model based on reciprocity and collaboration guided by Nature and the Sacred

Link to their: [COVID-19 Relief Fund for Indigenous Community Support](#)

Alexis Bunten

Yup'ik Nation

Co-director at the Bioneers Indigeneity Program

<https://bioneers.org/>

Manager, consultant, and applied researcher for indigenous, social and environmental programming for over 15 years

Recipient of the Alaska Library Association Award for her 2015 novel, "'So, how long have you been Native?' Life as an Alaska Native Tour Guide"

Haru, Hayra and Rudá from the Kuntanawa Nation

The Kuntanawa are 1 of the 13 tribes that live in the State of Acre in the Brazilian Amazon; Haru and Hayra are the main leaders of the Nation today. Haru Kuntanawa's influential leadership led to the revitalization of their culture's reemergence, following the Nation's genocide during the early 20th century by rubber-tappers which left 5 survivors.

To learn more about the Kuntanawa Nation's history:

kuntanawa.org

Link to their Go Fund Me fundraising for urgent aid during the COVID-19 crisis:

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/kuntanawa-sustainable-food-security-campaign>

Webinar Notes:

Jo:

- There's a lack any PPEs, like appropriate masks, reaching indigenous communities in the US during COVID-19

- No evacuation available to the nearest facilities, lack of rapid testing
 - Knows of someone who's contracted Coronavirus but had to wait 8 days to get his test results back
 - Think of all the people he had indirect and direct contact with during this time frame
 - The importance of Elders in indigenous communities
 - If they pass away, our culture will disappear with them
 - They hold the Nation together, essential leaders

Atossa:

- Indigenous people's protection from outside invaders at risk
 - On top of this, facing effects of deforestation, gold mining, oil drilling
- Go to amazonemergencyfund.org to donate what you can
 - 100% proceeds go directly to the front lines
- **The Amazon Rainforest is a vital organ to the planet**

Patricia (Atossa's guest):

- Introduction by Atossa:
 - Patricia is a leader, spokesperson for the indigenous women's movement in the Amazon
 - Spoke at the United Nations, shareholder meetings, and to the Vatican
 - Successfully stopped oil extraction in her people's territories
 - Atossa is close to their indigenous community
- Patricia:
 - These are times of reflection, we need to realize changes
 - If we fail to do this, the times that follow will be very painful
 - Along with COVID-19, our people are facing floods, hunger, dengue fever, a recent volcanic eruption-- **not just one emergency, but many**
 - They have no access to soap, alcohol, or any proper protection gear
 - We are essentially **invisible**, there's no coverage on our stories, no attention given by government entities
 - **Some Elders have already passed**
 - Indigenous people are trying to keep up with testing and case tracking

- This crisis is evidence to us that we've trespassed the environment
- Extermination of indigenous people could occur
 - 80% of our crops wiped out from prior floods
 - Started to plant their own crops in preparation for what's to come in the future
 - One positive aspect of the crisis has been how indigenous communities now hold stronger confidence in their own medicinal practices, and have been reviewing these again
 - The people don't trust medical doctors as much as their plant-based medicinal aids
 - There needs to be respect-- nature is a living being, subject to its own rights
- **"Wipe out the amazon, wipe out humanity"**
- "We're not just fighting for our indigenous people, we are looking out and fighting for your children; the children of company executives who may not believe in our beliefs."
- Patricia will hopefully be invited to speak again in the future

Clare:

- Elders are extremely necessary to their communities and to the rest of us on this planet
- When you hear these experiences from indigenous people during COVID-19, don't just hear then forget, because you have learned something new
 - Help in any way you can-- if you think you've done enough, you really haven't
- Elders are the keepers of vast knowledge; we can't just let them disappear into thin air

Jyoti:

- **"If the Grandmother's heart is not on the ground, there's still hope in the air"**
- Grandmothers (female indigenous Elders) are standing up midst all of this
 - There is a war on nature like never before
- All of this is part of The Great Turning, The Great Change
- Because we took the Earth's lungs, She's unplugging ours

- She's been trying to tell us any way She could
- We must tend to the roots of this culture
- Fundraising for communities we've worked with
- Listen and see the structures that are coming together
 - Go right back to your heart and stand in the present moment

Alexis (Jyoti's guest):

- Working with many indigenous peoples
- PhD in Cultural Anthropology at UCLA
- Focus on the West Coast
- Research - talked with 60-70 indigenous people
 - Been keeping track of all of their responses
- The people called answered a survey,
 - Aggregated answers to find the following trends:
 - Urban-dwelling indigenous people are getting hit just as hard with COVID-19 as those living in rural areas
 - In urban areas, indigenous people are the most forgotten in all relief efforts and discussions, also in the media
- TB outbreaks common in places like Alaska, so there's some experience with handling a contagious outbreak
 - Have been monitoring infections, isolating people while they recover
- More findings from survey:
 - 75% of families represented by the survey said they experienced some form of food insecurity
 - Food banks shut down in some cases, can't go to the store
 - Nearly 60% of families had difficulty accessing "necessary supplies"
 - I.e. gas, safe water, school equipment, water at all
 - 30% said they didn't know the answer to that question
- Survey launched on March 13 shutdown in April
 - Another question asked: What could support families?
 - Food, cleaning supplies, toiletries, technology*, school supplies, cultural supplies (basket weaving materials, beads) mental health and suicide prevention support, money, tutoring support
- Additional trends:

- The 1-time US Government Stimulus payment (\$1200) didn't reach Elders because many live off the grid
 - Some tribes can distribute the money to their people, but others are struggling to get the funds at all
- Urban indigenous people can't get help because they don't live in close contact or proximity to their nation, so they're left in the dark
- Finances: Family scenarios: 1) parents work in essential service so high risk of contracting COVID-19 2) main provider(s) lost their jobs so the consequences are felt by the other members in the family
 - Rent and eviction are huge concerns
- Some rural reservations are closing the roads leading to them
 - Authorities seen trespassing these blockages- threat to **tribal sovereignty**

Jo:

- Cheyenne River Sioux and Oglala Sioux tribes placed road restrictions to limit access to their reservations to protect against COVID-19 infections
 - South Dakota governor, Kristi Noem (R), demanded they remove these, threatened to sue them because she claimed these highway roads are federal property
 - This situation presents the erroneous message that indigenous people don't deserve sovereignty
 - 17 senators vocally opposed the push against the road restrictions and the tribes were able to keep them in effect
 - In general across the US, travel restrictions to indigenous reservations are still upheld, even if roads are considered federal property

Further background information on this incident: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/may/14/sioux-coronavirus-roadblocks-south-dakota-governor>

Alexis:

- Transportation is an issue
 - people forced to borrow cars from one another
- Household demographic changes
 - more family members moving back home

- Education suffering
 - High schoolers scared to drop out because might be forced to work and support their families
 - Others worried they're not on track for graduation
 - 80% of families surveyed don't have a reliant internet connection
 - 60% of households don't have adequate technologies, and if they do, they have to share with 3 or more other family members
 - Currently raising funds to get internet hubs, tech

Haru, Hayra and Rudá from the Kuntanawa Nation:

- Clare met them in person in two occasions
 - Haru, along with the nation's leaders, continues to piece his tribe together against enormous opposition
 - Food resources dried out, rivers are poisoned
 - Leader for 20 years
 - Hayra is a licensed Chinese medicine doctor and spiritual leader
- Haru:
 - Has been listening to the speakers and the struggles specific to each of the regions mentioned in the webinar so far
 - 1200 people infected in Brazilian indigenous communities
 - More than 82 deaths, some leaders
 - Great moment for humanity to work on reflecting
 - Many people have used masks to hide themselves, to say they're doing good for the world when in reality, they're doing the opposite
 - The great mask we have worn is the Amazon Rainforest
 - This mask has protected us from events around the world, so we know people are now frightened by the coronavirus being able to reach our people
 - In Acre, 5-6 nations are infected
 - One of these is ours- we have cases in our family, specifically those who live in the main city and in the nearest city
 - Affected food security
 - Governmental leaders are focused on other types of development

- Continuing deforestation, specially on reserves and indigenous lands
 - Nothing in place to support indigenous communities in terms of policies, and if there are, they're small efforts that don't present large changes for our situation
 - Thoughts of division, competition and conflict are no longer sustainable
 - We must be alert and help, invest our energy and resources in the good for humanity
- Our people have so much to contribute to the planet
- We have solutions to food security implementing clean and renewable technologies to support ourselves here, but no financial means to put them into action

➤ Hayra:

- Lived with the tribe for over 3 yrs now, since then the community has evolved at a slow pace
- Genocide has left a few survivors- they were then forced into sex slavery, won freedom from this 32 yrs ago, but no support afterwards by the government
 - Forced to give up knowledge, so left with high levels of poverty
- Haru works hard to connect with Elders in order to remember how to live authentically here and step into a path of guardianship
- Our rivers are contaminated, fish are dying
 - Fires occurred often before, but not like those from recent years
 - Lost rain, so rivers are dried up
 - Lack of transportation, wildlife dead near the river, hunting increased by non-indigenous people
 - We're forced to hunt our wildlife ourselves because lack of food
- Now, finding springs, wells, asking for funds to process the water
- Women are having pregnancy complications
 - Long-term diseases are also a concern
- Plan to create fish farm ponds
- The government wants to push indigenous people out*

- Important to protect the Kuntanawa, but also the existing undiscovered tribes in the Amazon
- There are no hospitals, want to build one
 - No schools
- Haru:
 - Government removed Kuntanawa from the map as if they were extinct
 - Our work is to raise people's consciousness - preserving the land, nature, rivers
 - Suffered invasions because of lack of policies

Atossa:

- Recast of the celebrity fundraiser video
 - On the 26th of June
 - Online on the Amazon Emergency Fund website

A note from Claudia Blanco to TreeSisters:

"Throughout the Indigenous Voices on The Pandemic webinar, we were again reminded of how rarely indigenous stories and experiences are shared at all on mass media. In common with other embedded social issues, the emergency of this pandemic also emphasized the ways governments continue to fail indigenous people living within their borders. Through this first contact with you and your organization, TreeSisters, we wanted to express our gratitude for your presence in the event and the important ideas you contributed to this essential discussion regarding indigenous perspectives during the COVID-19 pandemic. We were inspired to document it, so I took notes on the highlights from the 2-hour webinar. If you'd like, feel free to share them with your following. "



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