

Declaration of the Taitas meeting

In Yurayacu, Caquetá, Colombian Amazonian piedmont, indigenous territory of the Ingano people, between June 1 and 8, 1999, we the traditional indigenous doctors - Taitas, Sínchis, Curacas and Payés - have met for the "Taitas meeting".

In the event participated representatives of the Inga, Kofan, Siona, Kamsa, Coreguaje, Tatuyo y Cari and Carijona peoples. This meeting was held behind closed doors.

We want to thank the Ingana organization Tanda Chiridu Inganocuna (ORINSUC), that hosted and made possible the meeting. We want to thank also the non-indigenous brothers of the Amazon Conservation Team -ACT- who have joined our cause and contributed with technical and financial resources to make possible this historic meeting.

After 500 years of conquest, dispossession and death for our communities and our knowledge, for the first time we, the traditional indigenous and Colombian yagé doctors, have been able to meet, exchange knowledge, establish friendships and unite for a common cause and a common thought.

After eight days, in which we have reflected on our medicine, performed three yagé ceremonies and visited the ancestral stone of Yurayacu, we, the taitas, declare:

1° In Amazonian piedmont region still survive several indigenous peoples, who received, as a heritage from the ancestors, wisdom in medicinal plants, knowledge of the jungle and ability for the management of the sacred vine: the yagé.

2° We consider that yagé, medicinal plants and our wisdom are a gift from God and a great benefit for the health of whole the humanity. This meeting can be our last chance to unite and defend ourselves. We are not moved by economic or political interests.

We are obliged to show our values to the world with determination and seriousness. As children of the same father and as brothers who live on Mother Earth, we want to speak to all and offer our contribution so that life, peace and health may be possible.

3° Now indigenous people are realizing the importance of our wisdom and the value of our medicinal and sacred plants.

Many of them are desecrating our culture and our territories, trading yagé and other plants, dressing like natives and acting like charlatans. We see with concern that a new form of tourism is being promoted to deceive foreigners with supposed taitas or "shamans" services in several villages of the Amazonian piedmont.

Even many of our own indigenous brothers do not respect the value of traditional medicine and walk around in towns and cities making business with our symbols and deceiving people.

4° Somebody wants to patent the seeds and become his owner. Government members want to declare yagé as a narcotic plant and prohibit its use for humanity.

At the same time, we denounce that many anthropologists, botanists, doctors and other scientists are conducting experiments with yagé and medicinal plants without taking into account our ancestral knowledge and our collective intellectual property rights.

5° We denounce the outrage committed with our Tatuyo brothers from Yapus, Vaupés, who, while on their way to attend this meeting, were robbed by the authorities of the yagé they brought to share during the ceremonies.

6° We demand respect for our territories, our indigenous medicine and for taitas or traditional doctors.

We ask to understand that our medicine is also a science, although not in the same way that Westerners think of it. We Taitas are true doctors and with our knowledge we have been able to contribute effectively to the well-being of our peoples for centuries.

Moreover, our medicine goes beyond the body and seeks health in the mind, in the heart and in the spirit.

7° We demand the immediate suspension of the patent application submitted in the United States by Mr. Loren Miller. For us it represents an abuse and a serious desecration to our sacred plant. We declare that yagé and medicinal plants we use are part of the collective property and heritage of the indigenous peoples and any use in the name of the well-being of humanity must be done with our participation in the benefits derived from it.

8° We ask for the legal recognition of our autonomy in our peoples' health management, in accordance to our uses and customs.

9° We need to recover our territories and our sacred places. The jungle is for us the source of our resources. If the jungle come to an end, medicine and life are over.

10° We request support for our cause. The non-indigenous people can help us consolidate the unity and the defense of our traditional medicine, because it has been demonstrated that they also benefit from the wisdom of the Taitas.

11° At the end of the meeting, the Taitas have committed to work for the unity and defense of traditional medicine and to offer with dedication our services for the health of indigenous peoples and humanity.

12° We, the Taitas, commit ourselves to begin a process of certification of indigenous medicine's practitioners and to establish our own code of medical ethics. By this we will allow to easily recognize the difference between taitas and charlatans.

13° We are also available to organize health brigades for the indigenous peoples of Colombia and America who request us.

Being aware that non-indigenous require our services as doctors, we propose to build Hospitals of Indigenous Medicine, so that they can have easier access and in more appropriate and natural conditions to the way we work, always related to nature.

14° We, the Taitas attending this meeting, have decided to become the *Union of Indigenous Yageceros Doctors of the Colombian Amazon, UMIYAC*, and designate our own leaders to carry out the different actions to which we have committed and that will represent us before the world, the governments and the institutions.

For the purposes of disseminating this Declaration and the results of the meeting, we present a publication and an audiovisual record that we want to make public through our own representatives. The copyrights of these two instruments are property of the *Union of Indigenous Yageceros Doctors of the Colombian Amazon, UMIYAC*, and no use will be allowed without our consent.

We want to give a special greeting to our Taitas brothers who, for different reasons, could not be with us in this meeting. While thinking about them we have tried to take decisions that also represent them and we invite them to join from now the *Union of Indigenous Yageceros Doctors of the Colombian Amazon, UMIYAC*, and the process that we have started.

To our indigenous brothers we want to explain that the union of the Taitas does not seek to compete with or replace the important role of the indigenous organizations that currently represent us. On the contrary, we want to offer our service and support to strengthen your purposes.

We want to express gratitude to the brothers who in other countries have called for an agreement to defend our medical tradition, medicinal plants and yagé; we hope that our union will allow them to support us in a more effective way.

In this end of a century we are experiencing a dramatic time of violence, hate, poverty, injustice and diseases. Being at the gates of the new millennium we see the opportunity to close and heal this sad time for humanity.

We want to offer our participation in the construction of a time of hope, health and happiness. We are persuaded that yagé and medicinal plants of our territories and cultures, being a gift from the Creator, can help to make the healing of the world come true.

We, the Taitas, sign here to certify it. Yurayacu, June 7, 1999.