

**Geneva Dialogue on Environment,  
Climate, Conflict, and Peace:  
Meeting 9**

1 December, Zoom

**Facilitated discussion with [Ruth Miller](#), climate justice organizer with Native Movement, member of the Curyung Tribe**

- A lot of her work developed against development projects in her local area, but has expanded to encompass a lot of international organizing and taking multi-faceted approaches to protecting indigenous rights
- With our relationship to land, culture, and peace, comes a very real, alive history
  - Ruth took us through an exercise to understand the lived experience of colonization in Alaska, in which we were helpless to understand the language being yelled at us
  - Within the past 2-3 generations in Alaska, communities were forced through horrifying experiences at the hands of colonizers
  - About 80% of Alaska natives were wiped out by the plague and 1918 Spanish Influenza
- The relationship to land is tantamount
  - Previously, her elders lived in nomadic communities in relationship with the land and creatures that sustained them, a relationship of gratitude
  - An orientation of food that is given vs. food that is taken, and the animals are leaders within the natural world
  - Interdependency of the community on land, food systems, and animal relatives
  - This is not just a relationship between indigenous peoples and land, but it is extremely *human* to live in relationship with the land
    - Only very recently has food been commoditized as it is today
- One thing that indigenous communities today can offer is a long-term relationship, tenderness, ancestral and ecological knowledge that can be shared with new communities.
- Just transitions ([see zine here](#))
  - To further our work on peace, land-based rights, etc. we must center on the interconnection between points. We must make a compelling argument about why so many facets of our economy, culture, and legal approach to land must change.
  - We must get good at climate communications and share experiences from all levels.
    - How do we talk about climate information?
      - Demeaning or condescending tone and delivery?
      - Storytelling, photos, videos, and building empathy?
      - Speaking the “language” of the audience you are presenting to and meeting them at their interests?
  - Economy is not just the management of institutions, but the management of our home
  - The name “just transitions” did not resonate with their communities in Alaska. Instead, they called it “remembering forward.”
  - Essential to our work is countering individualism.

## Discussion Notes:

- How do I know where to start work on just transitions? It's so complex.
  - You work in collaboration.
    - Underlying the extractive economy are cultural norms and world views, which in today's world is White Supremacy and the overlegitimization of that which is produced by Whiteness. And one of the cultural norms of White Supremacy is individualism.
    - Success and failure should be integrated and experienced collaboratively, in peer groups, family systems, and group/holistic support.
    - Interdependence and interconnectivity.
  - Do the critical work to understand the stretch of the pervading cultural norms and structures that shape our world, and the ways they influence your own personal perceptions of "peace," "conflict," "the environment," etc.
- I am not indigenous to the place where I live. How do I honor the land?
  - When you meet someone for the first time, you might clean your appearance up a bit and be respectful to strangers. With family, we begin to read each other and better understand each other.
  - The timeline of our relationship with our earth is much longer than one generation. Indigenous peoples have a 10,000 year history with a specific piece of land.
  - When we come to a new land, we come as a guest, with utmost respect, and introduce ourselves as someone new.
- I've seen differing approaches on the ground from indigenous peoples vs. UN and NGOs who still operate in an extractive economy model - how do you develop a dialogue space to merge those visions?
  - Ask yourself: What can I do to bring these communities together? How can I serve as a bridge? What is unique in me that can act in service to create that space?
  - Uplift voices from the ground. Bring an indigenous community member along with you when you're invited to an event and/or give them your seat at the table.
  - Work in collaboration as equals to tribally led communities. Find ways to revalidate forms of knowledge and languages.
  - Build relationships and communicate people to people.
- Comments from the group
  - The zine really clearly sets out a path forward. In academia, we engage more and more towards complexity which makes them completely difficult to engage. Having simple plans enables change.
  - Individualism is still wildly pervasive across the development and peace fields. Even human rights are all something that we think of as mostly individualistic (i.e., a person has a right to water)
    - Whereas an indigenous framing on the right to water is that water is life.
  - This work helps clarify how I live my own life and perspective that I live through
    - Recommendation: Decolonizing Methodologies by Linda Tuhiwai Smith

- The current work that we do around environmental peacebuilding is always deeply historically embedded, no matter where we are. “Indigenous cultures” are not just in some parts of the world. Relationships to nature are not just in some parts of the world.
  - The concept of indigeneity is defined in different ways in different places. Some define it as only groups who have been oppressed by settler colonialism.
  - Some places recognize indigenous peoples and give them rights. Others do not.
  - It boils down to knowing and respecting place. It’s about land.
    - In environmental peacebuilding work, the leadership and stewardship of land is essential. It is about ensuring protections for these peoples and the plant & animal relatives that should also be valued as life.