



WORLD INDIGENOUS NATIONS HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM

10 November 2020

**POSITION PAPER**

to

**The UNESCO WORLD VIRTUAL INDIGENOUS CIRCLE ON OPEN SCIENCE AND THE  
DECOLONIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE FORUM**

NOVEMBER 2020

PRESENTED by Dr Keiki Kawai'ae'a,

**CO-CHAIR INTERNATIONAL BOARD OF ACCREDITATION ON BEHALF OF THE WORLD INDIGENOUS  
NATIONS HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM (WINHEC) EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Supporting Organisations within WINHEC:

- The International Board of Accreditation
- The World Indigenous Nations University
- The World Indigenous Research Alliance
- The Global Indigenous Elders and Youth Alliance

**Dear Chairperson and Members of the Open Science and the Decolonization of Knowledge  
Forum:**

In line with our traditional protocols, we pay respect to the Indigenous Elders and Traditional Owners, present and past, and we bring greetings from member institutions across the globe, Indigenous Elders and knowledge holders who have been the inspirational foundations of WINHEC as an international Indigenous Higher Education Consortium. On behalf of the Executive Committee we extend sincere appreciation for the opportunity to participate in this historic forum.

On behalf of the WINHEC Executive and members we also pay our respect to the Secretary-General, Canadian Commission and members of UNESCO Canada, members of the Open Sciences Organizing Committee and to the Indigenous community and colleagues, who today link into this historic global webinar.

We extend particular respect and acknowledgement to STOLŪEŁ John Elliott, Tsartlip First Nation, Katsi Cook, Wolf Clan Mohawk Akwesasne and Lorna Wanostsa'7 Williams, Lil'wat First Nation, Professor Emerita, University of Victoria, Canada for their grace and wisdom in welcoming us all to this forum and making such a forum possible.

Established at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference: Education in 2002, WINHEC has a membership that represents many Indigenous Nations and education institutions in eight countries – Alaska; Aotearoa; Australia; Canada; Hawaii; Norway; Taiwan and USA. In their collective concerns for the rights of Indigenous people to access all levels of education and to address the barriers that impeded respectful engagement of Indigenous peoples in teaching, research and other endeavors in education, the founding members determined that the goals and objectives of WINHEC must align with the goals and objectives of international instruments. These include the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Declaration on Human Rights; and other international documents of note designed to protect and promote the sovereign rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Chair it therefore gives us great pleasure to participate in this historic forum as it pertinent to the voices of Indigenous peoples, who for many years have acted to protect and promote the knowledge, values and practices, which are integral to the cultural heritage of Indigenous peoples.

WINHEC and its member organizations have joined together to prepare this Position Paper. It contains a commitment to accept in the principle, the Open Science proposal, as it aligns to goals and aspirations of Indigenous Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), Elders and scholars. This in principles support is at this stage is provisional upon several areas of concern being addressed, as they are seen an integral to the integrity of the proposal and the commitment of working with Indigenous peoples. Over the years WINHEC members have expressed a need to work with UNESCO to protect, preserve and promote Indigenous knowledge, values and cultural heritage as it pertains to the sovereign rights of their respective people. This Position Paper is written in accordance with the:

- UNDRIP;
- 2015 United Nations General Assembly Outcome Statement;
- Human Rights Council Resolution 9/7;
- and complimented by the:
- Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in its report on the first Session on October 1 - 3, 2008;
- Economic, and the Social and Cultural Rights;
- Convention on the Rights of the Child; Articles 29 & 30; and
- Articles 13 & 14 of the International Covenant Economic Social Council paper E/C.19/2010/14.

In line with the aforementioned documents, Article 14 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the goals and objectives of the Coolongatta Statement 1999 and the Mataatua Declaration 1993, the members of WINHEC have gathered over the past 18 years as a collective of Indigenous people to develop and advance a global movement in order to protect and to promote the:

- inherent rights of Indigenous people to establish and control their own educational systems and institutions;
- culture and knowledge of traditional languages;
- spiritual connection to the environment and resources;
- cultural heritage; and
- scholarship of cultural knowledge.

As a global movement of Indigenous educators, WINHEC members have strived to protect and secure the rights of Indigenous peoples to access education that is free of discrimination and barriers that impede them from respectful engagement and participation in teaching and research initiatives in both western and Indigenous-led cultural institutions.

As unprecedented challenges impact domestic security and sustainability, WINHEC respects the importance of sharing knowledge and resources to address those issues that increasingly pose a threat to the health, education, economic and social rights, and wellbeing of all citizens. Further to this, WINHEC acknowledges the need for greater collaboration of leaders across governments, education, spiritual and social organisations, and industry. It warrants our united attention. Whilst WINHEC is committed to working with UNESCO and other entities to accomplish this, it would be remiss if it was to do so without acknowledging barriers that continue to be of concern to the engagement of Indigenous peoples in this process.

In reviewing any proposal pertinent to the rights of Indigenous people, it is imperative that we stand united in our collective spirit to address the ongoing disparities experienced by Indigenous and non-Indigenous nations in their quest for fair and equitable access to policies and practices pertinent to education and research, for and about Indigenous peoples.

In considering the accomplishments that have been achieved, with regards to Indigenous people's access to education and research, it is important to acknowledge that there is still much more to be accomplished. As a collective of Indigenous educators, Elders and knowledge holders, WINHEC stresses the necessity for UNESCO and governments across the globe to seriously evaluate areas within their systems that continue to hinder Indigenous peoples from accessing and participating successfully in education and research. Particularly, where their cultural knowledge is respected and recognized in the development of policies and the progression of partnerships with Indigenous peoples.

The administration of education must be driven by institutional principles that enable all Indigenous/First Nations to affirm their rights to respect and recognition as unique knowledge holders in research and education. Also to engage in culturally safe, responsive, and inclusive learning and work environments be they students, staff or community stakeholders.

Unfortunately, despite the extensive commitments made over the years, the engagement, attrition and graduation of Indigenous peoples in western institutions continue to be of significant concern. Whilst Indigenous educators and Elders have engaged in partnerships with university personnel and researchers to address these concerns, their efforts have been met with a plethora of motherhood sentiments. These have done little to address the systemic and institutional barriers that have acted to impede, continue to impede, their productive engagement as partners in education and research.

WINHEC members stress the need for the Forum to call upon UNESCO to work with Nation States to identify ways in which institutions can fulfill their commitment to building bi-cultural and respectful partnerships with Indigenous people. This will help to create an education setting within schools, universities and other places of learning, that helps to restore, retain and record the cultural identity of Indigenous students and staff and respects their traditional languages, songs, social systems and self-determining interests through education<sup>1</sup>. Integral to this must be the recognition and respectful

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<sup>1</sup> WINHEC Constitution 2002

inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and knowledge systems in the spirit of reconciliation, reciprocity and free and informed consent.

WINHEC notes that while a significant number of institutions have advocated a commitment to addressing these endeavors, there is still much to be done before any sense of parity with non-Indigenous colleagues can be measurably evidenced.

From the Inuit People of the Arctic, the Aboriginal People of Australia, the Navajo People in New Mexico, the Indigenous people from Hawaii, Taiwan, Canada, the Maori people of New Zealand, the Sami people in Norway, the White Mountain Apache of Arizona, the Yanomami and the Tupi People of the Amazon, traditional pastoralists like the Maasai in East Africa, and tribal peoples like the Bontoc people of the mountainous region of the Philippines, Indigenous people across the globe have evidenced the impact of cultural knowledge as a viable foundation to their spiritual, economic, social, biomedical and environmental wellbeing, education and survival.

Traditional knowledge has helped to sustain Indigenous peoples across millennia. Whilst its philosophical and spiritual relevance has been nurtured across generations as part of cultural heritage and cultural sustainability, western education systems, political institutions and industry providers have often failed to give due recognition to the unique scholarship that underpins cultural knowledge and knowledge systems. Increasingly, as the world experiences unprecedented challenges that threaten to undermine world health, education and security, attention is being given to the relevance of cultural knowledge, as a means of sustaining and protecting wider humanity.

There has been a growing number of NGOs over the years who have expressed a need to protect traditional knowledge through a set of international standards. These have increased with changing time, especially in order to stop unauthorized and commercial misuse of such knowledge. It is important to protect the Indigenous people from such loss and also help them to preserve such ancient and traditional practices.

The transmission of traditional knowledge across generations is fundamental to protecting and promoting not only Indigenous peoples' cultural heritage and values but offers much to the global community in terms of addressing many of the challenges increasingly being witnessed globally.

The proposal proffered by the Open Sciences and Decolonization of Knowledge forum speaks to the spirit of compassion that underpins the cultural and spiritual practices of many Indigenous Nations across the globe. The caring and sharing for the greater good is a core value within the cultural heritage that has been passed down through generations.

However, whilst the proposal appears to align to those values that are seen as being integral to Indigenous Nations, it would be remiss of WINHEC if it failed to raise the issue that has been raised incessantly by Indigenous peoples over a prolonged period of time. That is, the ability to have the scholarship of their cultural knowledge recognized, respected and protected within institutions and that the use of such knowledge be aligned to the principles of free, prior and informed consent.

In reviewing the rights of Indigenous populations to have these principles adhered to within education, WINHEC urges the participants of the Forum to engage in a global scoping of best practice that is inclusive of Indigenous scholars, Elders and educators working in collaboration with UNESCO. This will afford the education institutions and governments a vital opportunity to work with NGOs and Indigenous people to identify and access best practice models of education, encouraging a more

respectful engagement of Indigenous people and more effective measures in meeting the needs of Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders, staff and students.

An international scoping exercise will help the Open Sciences forum to work with UNESCO to identify a framework that compliments the scholarship of Indigenous knowledge, promotes respect for Indigenous histories, languages, cultures and values amongst non-Indigenous students and staff, and produces graduates that are culturally competent and able to understand the historic and contemporary position of Indigenous people. A best practice model would also help reveal an epistemological and pedagogical framework within education that incorporates the scholarship of Indigenous knowledge in the development of teaching and research initiatives pertinent to Indigenous peoples, and encourages more respectful and collegial engagement of Indigenous educators, agencies and communities in the process.

Any discussion around the use of Indigenous knowledge in Open Sciences must be prefaced upon an assessment of the systemic, cultural, political and institutional barriers that negate the unique scholarship of cultural knowledge and the immense contributions that Indigenous knowledge holders could make to the development and delivery of research and education initiatives.

The integrity of such a model would need to be protected by the development and implementation of an International Quality Monitoring and Accreditation System. WINHEC currently has an International Affirmation/Board of Accreditation that would prove to be a key conduit in the discussions that could be held between international participants, the forum Organizing Committee, and UNESCO.

We are pleased to record that WINHEC members have a well documented record of addressing the educational anomalies experienced by Indigenous peoples in higher education within their respective nation states. These accomplishments have enhanced the work of the WINHEC Executive Committee through the establishment of a number of international working parties. Through its global activities, WINHEC has promoted the right of all Indigenous peoples to enjoy full access to and participation across all levels of education. Action has been taken to develop a set of principles and policies to encourage the protection and revitalization of Indigenous language and language systems. Further to this WINHEC has:

- Developed the WINHEC International Research Standards;
- Established the World Indigenous Education and Research Alliance; and
- Are working toward the establishment of a global alliance to promote the wisdom of esteemed Indigenous Elders and progressing the World Indigenous Nations University.

All of these initiatives are seen as integral to the protection and longevity of Indigenous cultures. All of these initiatives are chaired by highly regarded and widely respected Indigenous academics and knowledge holders, some of whom work in western institutions and others who work in community-based First Nations institutions. All share a commitment to protecting and promoting the unique scholarship that underpins the rich engagement of Indigenous peoples in teaching, research and other education based endeavors.

Chair, these initiatives are but a few examples of the work being undertaken by WINHEC and its members to promote and protect the rights of Indigenous people to access levels of education that

respect their cultural identity and equips them with the knowledge and skills required to accomplish social, economic and political parity.

WINHEC members have worked diligently to promote a human rights-based approach to Indigenous participation in higher education. However, as a collective of Indigenous educators, WINHEC cannot and should not continue to address these issues alone. It is a challenge to seek the formation of programs and initiatives within higher education that can evidence positive community impact; involve Elders and Indigenous educators; and address the cultural and professional esteem of Indigenous students and staff. Particularly, when institutional and systemic barriers continue to impede the aspirations of Indigenous people to full and respectful engagement in education that respectfully acknowledges, protects and promotes their unique knowledge.

Therefore, any attempt to discuss the feasibility of Open Sciences and the Decolonization of Knowledge forum will be limited in its achievements, while these barriers continue to be evident.

WINHEC encourages the Forum to establish an International working party to develop a set of international cultural standards that promote the principles of respectful engagement of Indigenous people in education, and recognizes the scholarship of Indigenous knowledge's and knowledge system, research methodologies and theoretical frameworks. WINHEC urges members of the Forum's Organizing Committee to pursue this recommendation. Indigenous peoples globally are still battling to have the scholarship of their knowledge and languages valued and respected within the western system, and to engage in partnership with institutions whereby their presence and contributions are afforded due recognition and respect. The inclusion of Indigenous Elders, knowledge holders and educators in this process must be considered as imperative.

On behalf of the members of WINHEC, we thank the Chair and Committee for providing us with the opportunity to share with you and members of the Forum the matters that we have raised with regards to the Open Sciences and Decolonization of Knowledge proposal.

WINHEC's recommendations are based on a commitment to working with the organizing committee and UNESCO to further develop and progress a consultative process with Indigenous stakeholders, NGOs, Indigenous Elders and knowledge holders, on matters pertinent to the Open Sciences and Decolonization of Knowledge proposal as it pertains to the sovereign rights of Indigenous peoples. WINHEC recommends progressing a framework that encourages and protects the respectful inclusion and recognition of Indigenous knowledge in the collective drive to address matters of global interest, and strengthens the respectful inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in research.

Chair, in summation, WINHEC thanks Dr Keiki Kawai'ae'a for presenting this Position Paper on its behalf. As a well respected WINHEC colleague, Dr Kawai'ae'a is Co-Chair of the International Board of Accreditation whose work has been immeasurable in helping Indigenous institutions successfully address the issues raised in this paper, affording the forum with a much tested and measurable model for respectfully promoting the scholarship of Indigenous knowledge and knowledge systems in education and research for and by Indigenous First Nations.

### **WINHEC's position on the Open Sciences and Decolonization of Knowledge Proposal**

WINHEC supports in principle, the Open Sciences Proposal as it pertains to validating, legitimising and recognizing Indigenous ways of knowing as Science, and as a gift that has been passed down through the generations since time immemorial.

However, WINHEC's support is provisional, as there is much to be discussed before the Executive Committee could endorse fully the Open Sciences and Decolonization of Knowledge proposal on behalf of its members.

In progressing the Open Science and Decolonization of Knowledge proposal, WINHEC considers it important that a more in-depth consultation process be entered into with NGOs, Indigenous scholars, Traditional knowledge holders and Elders to address several key questions pertinent to the engagement of Indigenous people in the process.

An integral part of the consultation process would require the following questions to be responded to.

***How does the Open Sciences Proposal align to and address?***

1. the goals and objectives of UNDRIP, the 2015 UN General Assembly Outcome document and other international documents of note that pertain to the sovereign rights of Indigenous People;
2. the many Indigenous voices that have expressed a concern for the misuse of Indigenous knowledge by western political, social, scientific and education institutions, as a commodifying resource; and
3. the call by Indigenous advocates for a set of international standards that protect and promote the scholarship of Indigenous knowledge and knowledge systems.

***Further queries that warrant clarification are:***

1. Why and how should science be “open”? For and with whom?
2. How does Open Science and the decolonization of Knowledge align to the goals and objectives of the UNDRIP, the 2014 UN General Assembly Outcome Statement, and other documents of note that are pertinent to Indigenous Peoples?
3. Is Open Science designed to make scientific articles and data fully available to researchers around the world at the time of publication, so they do not miss important results that could contribute to or accelerate their work?
4. Could this openness also enable citizens around the world to contribute to science with their capacities and expertise, such as through citizen science or participatory action research projects? If so, how does this relate to the protection of Indigenous cultural and traditional knowledge and the principles of ‘free, informed and prior consent’ provisions?
5. Does science that is truly open include a plurality of ways of knowing, including those of Indigenous cultures, Global South cultures, and other excluded, marginalized groups in the Global North? If so how does it protect the engagement of Indigenous peoples and the use of their knowledge from processes that commodify their input with little, if any, respect, resources or gain being given back to their communities or to the Indigenous scholars or Knowledge Holders involved?

***Provisions WINHEC also seeks to include:***

- Literature and strategies that align to and support Indigenous data sovereignty efforts to protect Indigenous cultural knowledge systems.
- Develop bibliometrics that include Indigenous criteria and impact that is seen equal to other knowledge systems and journal rankings – The Equity Lab led by Dr. Leslie Chan is actively working to close this gap <https://utsc.utoronto.ca/news-events/our-community/knowledge-equity-lab-elevating-voices-havent-been-heard-academia>
- Indigenous ethics should be the norm, not the exception, to conducting research with, for and about Indigenous peoples. Refer to the latest book by George, Tauri and MacDonald <https://books.emeraldinsight.com/page/detail/Indigenous-Research-Ethics/?k=9781787693906> .

In its support of the proposal, WINHEC would be happy to work with UNESCO as part of a working group to address these issues and to establish an International set of standards adopted by UNESCO regarding the use, recognition and protection of Indigenous knowledge and knowledge systems in the Open Sciences initiative.

WINHEC members applaud the move by UNESCO to provide greater engagement of Indigenous peoples in the Open Sciences process. WINHEC members consider the suggestions they have provided in this statement to be critical to developing a bi-cultural and respectful way forward, as it meets not only international UN standards around engagement and consultation, but standards that have been requested by NGOs, Indigenous scholars, knowledge holders and Traditional Elders in their quest to have their cultural rights, Indigenous knowledge and human rights acknowledged, as well as past injustices suffered to be not just acknowledged but addressed.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

That WINHEC be invited to participate in a working party with the forum Organizing Committee and UNESCO to engage in further consultations to progress the feasibility of the Open Sciences and Decolonization of Knowledge proposal and to accomplish the following imperatives.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2**

That the Forum encourage UNESCO to undertake a global scoping to identify good practice in terms of Institutional policies and programs that act to strengthen and retain the cultural integrity of local Indigenous people in education and Open Sciences more broadly

### **RECOMMENDATION 3**

That the Forum encourage UNESCO to develop a set of principles that define best practice in the engagement of Indigenous knowledge and knowledge holders in Open Sciences.

### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

That the Forum identify examples of good practice in policies and programs in western and community-based First Nations' education systems that have a positive impact on the well being, confidence, esteem and development of Indigenous local communities.

### **RECOMMENDATION 5**

That the Forum work collaboratively with WINHEC to establish an International Affirmation/Accreditation process to ensure that good practice models are culturally inclusive, strengthen and retain the cultural integrity of Indigenous peoples, and promotes Indigenous scholarship and knowledge inclusion within education systems and through appropriate policies and programs that underpin and support the same.

### **RECOMMENDATION 6**

That the Forum encourage UNESCO to develop a set of international standards for the intellectual and cultural protection rights of Indigenous people, Indigenous language and knowledge systems. Within



this process, UNESCO develops a process that formalizes a codeified recognition of Indigenous knowledge and knowledge systems, research methodologies, and theoretical frameworks.

Sincerely,



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