

TWENTY-NINTH REGULAR SESSION OF THE CEC COUNCIL
15 July 2022
Mérida, Yucatán, Mexico

2022 CEC COUNCIL PUBLIC SESSION – SUMMARY RECORD

Welcoming Remarks and Introduction of Video on CEC’s Accomplishments

Mexico’s CEC Alternate Representative, Miguel Ángel Zerón, opened the meeting by welcoming the public and the delegations from the three countries to the first hybrid session of the CEC’s Council. He highlighted the importance of openness and the relationship between the Council and the public for the development of the CEC’s collaborative work program and presented the Session theme: “Community-led environmental education for sustainable development”. He then invited SEMARNAT’s Undersecretary of Environmental Development and Regulation, Alonso Jiménez Reyes, to give welcoming remarks.

SEMARNAT Undersecretary Alonso Jiménez Reyes welcomed participants and shared that Secretary María Luisa Albores González sent her best regards, but unfortunately, was not able to attend the meeting. He started by acknowledging the participation and sustained interest of North American communities in the activities of the CEC and underlined the importance of their active participation in environmental decision-making. He stated that despite economic and health impacts from the pandemic, they were committed to continuing to work toward increasing environmental justice and social inclusion in North America from our shared environment. Undersecretary Alonso Jiménez also emphasized the important voices of youth, academics, scientists and Indigenous Peoples in the environmental dialogue. The Undersecretary also said that the public dialogue to follow would help identify elements that would strengthen programs and policies related to climate change and environmental justice and benefit the entire North American region. Finally, Undersecretary Alonso Jiménez reiterated the importance of performing activities that promote environmental justice, climate change adaptation and resilience, and the involvement of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in environmental policies were priorities for the Mexican government.

After, CEC’s Executive Director Richard A. Morgan presented a short video showcasing some of the most recent accomplishments of the CEC since the September 2021 Council Session., he shared that he was very proud of the work accomplished by the CEC and highlighted its unique value in creating networks, bringing people together, developing tools and resources, facilitating knowledge exchange, and helping to empower local communities, among other contributions.

Item 7: Youth Innovation Challenge Winners

Richard Morgan presented the winners of the CEC Youth Innovation Challenge (YIC)’s 6th edition and provided background information on the contest, which started back in 2016. This year’s challenge was launched in February 2022 and invited young entrepreneurs and community leaders to submit solutions that would address issues at the intersection of Covid-19 and sustainability. The CEC received more than 100 solutions, covering a range of topics from mental health and social connection to food waste and environmental education. Mr. Morgan introduced the three winning teams and invited them to present their concepts:

Canada: Jérémy Lavoie, Mariève Dallaire-Lamontagne, and Jean-Michel Allard-Prus [Inscott]

- Inscott tackles current challenges in the treatment of animal waste from livestock and slaughterhouses. This solution proposes the local upcycling of several hundred tons of industrial

animal waste per week to feed and raise edible insects that are later reused as ingredients for animal feed and plant fertilizers. From pandemic-related supply chain disruptions and delays in waste management processes to addressing public health hazards, Inscott aims to introduce a circular economy perspective to the agro-industry as an alternative to conventional animal waste management in order to improve resilience in communities.

United States: Kyra Trent and Tameira Shepherd

- Grandma's Hands is an initiative in the form of a community sewing workshop that offers low-cost and energy-efficient alternatives and practical solutions to the wastefulness of fast fashion mass production. Inspired by the legacy of grandmothers, this socially-centered solution addresses community recovery by providing the practical skill sets needed to recover from textile shortages, as well as repurposing machines and textiles that would have otherwise been considered trash. The non-electric sewing machines that they use are a valuable and sustainable asset, especially in communities where electricity is not always reliable. Their workshops are geared toward beginners and lovers of vintage processes alike.

Mexico: Rodrigo Trejo

- Circular Economy: "From the Port to the Garden" is an innovative solution that builds a bridge between the fishing and agriculture industries in order to change the current paradigm of our society to feed and produce. Focusing on Mexican fishermen and coastal communities, this solution addresses issues surrounding the disposal of fish waste and its resulting impact on the public health of fishing communities. Based on a circular economy perspective, fish waste from one industry is taken and transformed into a high-quality fertilizer for use by others to grow locally produced, nutrient-rich crops. Through the introduction of this circular economy approach, fishing, coastal, and agricultural communities can come together in a shared effort to reduce waste, grow healthy foods, and encourage the exchange of local resources among the various groups.

Mexico's CEC Alternate Representative Miguel Ángel Zerón congratulated all the winners for their innovative concepts and positive impact on North American communities. Mr. Zerón then invited the Council to provide their comments to the winners.

US EPA Administrator Michael Regan congratulated the winners. He shared that he firmly believed that the future resides in the hands of youth and historically, the success of entrepreneurial or social movements in the US has often been due to young people. Administrator Regan also shared that he was pleased and proud to see that the winning concepts were not only innovative but also entrepreneurial and sound from a business standpoint.

Undersecretary Jiménez Reyes also offered his sincere congratulations to the winners. He said that youth's awareness allows them to see their environment, identify the needs of their communities, and think beyond conventional methods to address these needs. He also underlined their key role in putting forth solutions to address climate change and reiterated that the health of communities was part of Mexico's priorities.

Minister Steven Guilbeault extended his appreciation and admiration to the winners and all participants in the Youth Innovation Challenge (YIC). The Minister said he truly admired their dedication and highlighted how the visions presented by the YIC winners represented what the three countries were trying to achieve.

Item 8: Dialogue with the Council on Lessons Learned from Community Conservation Practices based on Environmental Education

Alternate Representative Miguel Ángel Zerón turned to Louie Porta, the 2022 Chair of the CEC's Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC), to moderate the panel of experts and dialogue with the Council on "Lessons learned from community conservation practices based on environmental education."

Mr. Porta presented the structure of the session and introduced the invited experts, giving an overview of the work implemented in their communities:

- Canada: Valérie Courtois, Director of the Indigenous Leadership Initiative;
- United States: Rashida Ua Bakari Ferdinand, Founder and CEO of Sankofa Community Development Corporation; and
- Mexico: Paulina Garrido Bonilla, Director of the Tosepan Cooperatives Union.

Mr. Porta opened the dialogue period by inviting the Council members to express their views on challenges and opportunities related to community-led environmental education for sustainable development, giving an overview of the work implemented in their communities:

Administrator Regan responded that there were significant opportunities for community-led environmental education initiatives. Since 1990, EPA's mission statement has focused on environmental education, he said, and that over US\$3 million had been provided in community grants to address a variety of environmental issues. He explained further that these grants had allowed EPA to learn from communities and that there are community-led solutions to address environmental issues and climate change impacts.

Undersecretary Alonso Jiménez Reyes emphasized the importance of local and Indigenous knowledge and how often knowledge is misunderstood as coming only from academia. He stated that encouraging dialogue with Indigenous Peoples, local communities and Afro-Mexican communities is a priority for the Mexican government and emphasized the importance of listening. He also highlighted the importance of building together with Indigenous and local communities and how they were creating knowledge centers near communities.

Minister Guilbeault explained the importance of environmental education in addressing current environmental challenges and how governments cannot implement bold and ambitious measures if the public does not understand them. He then described a few initiatives being implemented by the Canadian government, such as the Indigenous Guardians, dedicated to Indigenous leadership on conservation, and the Climate Action and Awareness Fund, representing C\$200 million dedicated to youth and researchers to help raise awareness on the impacts of climate change.

Mr. Porta thanked the Council for their responses and turned to the invited experts for a few questions to continue the dialogue.

Question to Rashida Ua Bakari: Can you share an example of community-led conservation practice, based on environmental education, that has effectively engaged local communities?

Ms. Ua Bakari presented the marshland restoration work done in her neighborhood in New Orleans. She explained that the area had been decimated after Hurricane Katrina and that the nearby marshland, already impacted by the construction of a channel by the government back in 1976, had been filled with trash and toxic wastes. Working with community leaders, wetland ecologists, academic partners, landscape architects, schools, children and community stakeholders, they restored 40 acres of marshland, which has allowed the return of natural processes and wildlife. She emphasized the important environmental and

cultural educational component of their project and how they have partnered with educators and elders so that children can learn about the importance of wetlands and learning how to fish. She further explained that the development of the programs was based on the needs identified by the community itself. Finally, Ms. Ua Bakari underlined the importance for communities to have access to natural areas in their neighborhoods.

Question to Paulina Garrido Bonilla: From your point of view, what are the most difficult challenges in environmental education to continued advancements of better conservation practices?

Ms. Garrido Bonilla thanked the CEC for the invitation and explained that for the Mazahua People, the concept of conservation is linked to something untouchable and very valuable. She stated that addressing environmental conservation challenges has to be approached from the point of view of respect, reciprocity, and living in harmony with all natural resources. Ms. Garrido Bonilla also emphasized the importance of considering academia and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) in finding solutions for coexisting with the environment. She then presented the Life Plan developed by the Mazahua community and explained that for Indigenous Peoples, caring for the environment is fundamental and the greatest challenge is transmitting ancestral knowledge in schools. She concluded by highlighting the importance of fostering spaces for dialogue and alliances that include the voices of Indigenous Peoples as well as the existing water crisis and the need to improve current practices to ensure its availability in the future through a plan's life.

Question to Valerie Courtois: From your experience, how can community-led environmental education, and its continued development of knowledge, contribute to addressing common environmental problems in the North American region?

Ms. Courtois thanked the organizers for inviting her to participate virtually from her home territory of Nitassinan. She highlighted the richness and diversity of Indigenous communities in Canada, which consist of four Inuit regions (51 Inuit communities), 51 First Nations (634 First Nation communities) and countless Métis communities. She also explained that Canada was on a journey of truth and reconciliation, which includes the recognition of Indigenous knowledge. Ms. Courtois highlighted that Indigenous Peoples had been living sustainably on the territory for over 10,000 years and that most remaining areas of significant biodiversity are located on Indigenous land. This underlines the importance of developing partnerships with Indigenous Peoples as part of biodiversity conservation strategies. Ms. Courtois then presented Indigenous Guardians, an Indigenous stewardship initiative developed by Nations across Canada, and she highlighted the importance of this cross-cultural approach to education that includes Indigenous knowledge and Western science. Finally, Ms. Courtois also shared current efforts to establish a national guardianship network, a national curriculum framework and certification, as well as Indigenous propositions for protected areas in Canada.

Mr. Porta thanked the experts and then turned to the three Ministers with the following question: *Can you provide examples that demonstrate how the experiences and knowledge acquired by communities have impacted [governmental] policies or programs in your country?*

Administrator Regan shared that he had been engaging directly with communities to learn about solutions being developed on the ground. For example, in 2021, he embarked on a three-day justice tour in the states of Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas, where the agenda had been developed by the communities. As part of this tour, he visited schools with water pressure issues and communities experiencing health issues that were located near refineries and listened to their solutions, desires, and goals. Finally, he explained how they had developed policies and took action based on what they had seen and heard from the communities.

Undersecretary Alonso Jiménez Reyes thanked the experts for sharing their work with communities. He also highlighted the important role of Indigenous Peoples as stewards of the land. He then shared how

Mexico had transformed a detention center into an environmental education center on Isla Marías where Mexican youth are being trained to protect their territory from a theoretical and practical point of view. Through this program, they will create a network of youth guardians working to protect the environment in their territories, replicating good practices among communities.

Minister Guilbeault also thanked the three experts for their testimony and stated the importance of involving and listening to people and communities. He referred to Valerie Courtois' presentation and reiterated that Canada could not achieve its protection goals without Indigenous Peoples at the table and explained that the Canadian government had allocated C\$340 million for Indigenous-led conservation programs, such as Indigenous Guardians. Minister Guilbeault then shared other government initiatives that came from listening to communities, such as the Government of Canada's support of the proposed bill on environmental justice, the commitment to creating ten new national urban parks, the creation of a fund for the development of cycling paths and trail infrastructure, and the proposed legislative bill to include the right to a healthy environment in the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

Mr. Porta thanked the Ministers for their answers and provided instructions to the public wishing to participate in the public question and answer segment of the Public Dialogue. Before turning to questions from the public, he invited the youth delegate, Alfredo Porco, to report on the youth networking session of earlier that day on environmental challenges and the role of environmental education from a youth perspective.

On behalf of the nine youth delegates, Mr. Porco thanked the CEC for elevating the voices of youth and including them in the collective efforts. Mr. Porco stated that they were bringing with them their fear, sadness, and frustration related to the climate crisis—but also their enthusiasm, innovation, and boldness. He shared their central recommendation to formally include youth in CEC consultation and decision-making through a permanent committee and their priorities, which he enumerated as: 1) activism outreach that uplifts frontline regional voices at the CEC; 2) an environmental forum that connects innovators with sponsors; 3) project funding that helps grow environmental grassroots; 4) a mentorship program between older and newer organizations that supports growth; and 5) transboundary ecological protection zones in each country for areas that carry continental importance. Finally, he explained how these ideas spoke directly to the foundation of CEC principles of trade and sustainable development and how they could help the three countries, working together, build a better continental future.

Mr. Porta thanked the youth delegation and the public for their level of participation and proceeded to ask questions from the public:

Question # 1: People today—especially young people—are feeling more anxious and less hopeful about the future than any time in the modern era. We're talking about empowering communities, but what are ways that we can really close the gap and make people feel like they can make a difference?

Minister Guilbeault stated that, as a father of four, he has come across many young people that have expressed their anxiety about the future. He then explained that 30 years ago, the strategy chosen by climate change activists to gain attention and encourage people to action was to emphasize climate change impacts and disasters. Although this strategy helped raise awareness of climate change issues, it didn't result in people taking action and, in many cases, actually terrorized the public. Minister Guilbeault finished by emphasizing the need for activists to communicate a vision for the new world they are trying to build, and to encourage optimism among young people about the future.

Undersecretary Jiménez Reyes shared that they were looking at how to better integrate environmental education, starting from elementary school. He explained that the pandemic and virtual classes had brought

additional challenges but that they had started to celebrate days dedicated to specific topics, such as the Day of Pollinators and the Day of Water, to raise youth awareness on these topics.

Question #2: How can new technologies support community-led environmental education efforts?

Administrator Regan shared how excited he was about the role of technology in community-led environmental education. New technologies allow for increased access to data and information for communities and create unprecedented levels of transparency. New educational tools can help communities advocate for themselves and for the solutions they would like to see implemented, giving them a leader role. Administrator Regan also revealed that the US Congress had approved a US\$100 million appropriation for community grants that would monitor air quality for increased environmental justice. Finally, he emphasized that providing resources directly to communities and linking them to technology will strengthen transparency and support advocacy.

Ms. Rashida Ua Bakari also shared that they were using applications to help children identify trees, birds, and wildlife in the wetland park. She explained that for children to become stewards of their environment they had to understand it and, for example, learn to recognize and understand the role of native species and migratory species versus invasive species, and their positive and negative effects.

Ms. Valerie Courtois highlighted the huge opportunities provided by technologies for remote communities and the importance for communities to be able to share information about their work. She explained that Indigenous Peoples had tight social networks and that these often translated into social media and other tools. Ms. Courtois also mentioned three recommendations from a report *A New Shared Arctic Leadership Model*¹ by the Governor General of Canada, Mary Simon: 1) the need for guardians taking care of the landscapes; 2) the need for more protected areas, land-use planning and more Indigenous management; and 3) the need to have remote communities connected and have access to clean technologies. Finally, Ms. Courtois highlighted that people protect what they love, that technology was allowing them to share the beauty of the boreal forest and the Arctic region with the rest of the world and that they hope that it can help them protect it.

Question #3: Regarding the Indigenous Guardians initiative, how is the synergy between traditional knowledge and Western academia? How often are there disagreements and how do you figure out who is right and who is wrong?

Ms. Valerie Courtois explained that there were a lot of synergies and several training programs by Western academia throughout Canada. She highlighted those positive synergies could only happen if Indigenous knowledge was recognized as being as important as Western science. Concerning disagreements, she shared that her elders had taught her that her responsibility as a guardian was to use the best available information. She finished by emphasizing that the amount of information from traditional knowledge and Western science allowed making well-informed decisions and that it was a space for collaboration, consensus, and relationships, more than for debate and argumentation.

Ms. Paulina Garrido Bonilla shared that her cooperative had implemented an education-training program for preschool, elementary, and secondary schools. A fundamental aspect of their program is that children learn by doing. Sharing intergenerational knowledge is another very important part of the program, where

¹ Mary Simon, The Minister's Special Representative on Arctic Leadership. *A New Shared Leadership Model for the Arctic*, Special Report <<https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1492708558500/1537886544718> />.

children learn from their grandparents how to live in harmony with nature. Finally, she stressed the importance of youth education since youth will be the future guardians of the territory.

Question #4: What can we teach children in schools in an uncertain environmental context? How do we bring environmental awareness to schools as a development policy?

Ms. Rashida Ua Bakari stressed the need to bring the students to the environment, for the educational structure in place was not conducive to learning about the environment, wellness, and health. She then shared her vision that the schools should come to the park, which will enable children to have an outdoor, hands-on education. Ms. Ua Bakari explained that they have faced some challenges when sharing their vision and had to help rethink and rebuild what is considered education. She concluded by explaining that they were starting an early childhood educational program, where children could be immersed in nature as a space for learning and for play different from the conventional school environment.

Question #5: What areas do you suggest focusing on first for equitable participation ? This will provide us with perspectives on where to prioritize for our planning to increase efficiency and maximize our momentum.

Minister Guilbeault began by saying that youth were amazing ambassadors because they represent the future but also because they can influence their environment. He explained that in the province of Quebec, there was a network of 2000 schools that are part of the *Brundtland Schools Program*, where they implement environmental projects in their schools and their communities. He explained that youth were also powerful agents of change with their parents and finished by saying that any type of action linked to education of their peers and to adults was very valuable.

Undersecretary Jiménez Reyes underscored the importance of children and youth and said that in Mexico they were working closely with the Secretary of Education to raise youth awareness of environmental topics as early as possible. He also explained that there were more opportunities in rural areas to live in nature and that more innovative thinking was needed to provide youth in urban areas the opportunity to connect with nature, through learning by doing.

Administrator Regan stated that he didn't believe the voice of youth should be monolithic but should be prioritized. He stated that he believed youth should understand and embrace the power of their voice and weigh in on every facet of society since they are the ones that are going to inherit it. By weighing in, they can help shape the future in the way they believe it should be.

Ms. Rashida Ua Bakari highlighted that spatial equity was linked to where people live and to what they have access to. She explained that having the wetland park in their neighborhood was equity in itself and how, by creating these spaces where education is available, they can help community members realize that they have a right and a voice to make a difference.

Ms. Paulina Garrido Bonilla underscored the importance of creating spaces for intergenerational dialogue and the fundamental value of listening. Particularly, she stressed the importance of listening to the experiences of elders and the strength of youth and how equity must include both. Finally, she highlighted the role of technology in facilitating this intergenerational dialogue.

Ms. Valerie Courtois thanked Ms. Garrido Bonilla for her intervention and for highlighting the importance of intergenerational dialogue. She then shared that Indigenous youth in Canada had started a movement to be educated on the land and emphasized its importance in facilitating the delivery of education, but also in helping them to heal. She explained that relationship could occur with landscapes and that Indigenous youth were feeling the intergenerational traumas caused by residential schools and colonialism. Finally, she stated

that youth needed to have hope for their future and that when their Nations, when Indigenous Peoples, will have equity, then Indigenous youth will have a much better chance to achieve it, as well.

Item 9: Council Announcements

Mexico's CEC Alternate Representative Miguel Ángel Zerón thanked the experts and the public for their participation and invited the Council to proceed with their announcements.

Undersecretary Jiménez Reyes announced the implementation of the CEC Environmental Education Initiative in 2022. He explained how environmental education is fundamental and how this initiative will contribute to strengthening capacities through concrete actions. Undersecretary Jiménez Reyes reiterated environmental education is a fundamental activity to comply common goals focus on the valuation of ecosystems and their services for the population. Also offers the opportunity to use tools, create skills and make awareness of our society on knowledge dissemination through education strategies. By fostering collective actions and stressing the importance of Indigenous Knowledge and their cosmovision on life to keep a balanced relationship with nature is an element that we should transfer to daily activities. Finally, he explained how respect, care for nature, cultural expressions and life itself were essential to set an ethical basis for a more sustainable society and how this could be promoted through environmental education.

Administrator Regan announced the launch of a second cycle of the EJ4 climate grant program initiated by the US EPA in 2021. He explained that the grant program had been established to fund projects that support underserved and vulnerable communities and Indigenous communities in Canada, Mexico, and the United States by directly funding community-based organizations. The call for proposals will be launched in September 2022 and the theme will be: *Integrating community-led environmental education in support of environmental justice and climate resilience*. Administrator Regan also provided an update on the Air Quality Improvement for Environmental Justice project and the Community Environmental Justice Network project. The former should begin implementation later in the summer of 2022 and the latter in the fall.

Minister Guilbeault applauded JPAC's commitment to supporting the CEC's mission and highlighted the group's important role in facilitating environmental cooperation between the Parties and securing public participation. He commended them for their efforts in continuing to integrate Indigenous perspectives into their work and highlighted how traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) contributes to a better understanding of environmental processes. Minister Guilbeault then announced the launch of the Resilience of Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems project, led by the Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group (TEKEG), as well as the Sustainable Forestry and Responsible Consumption of Wood Products project to be led by the JPAC. He thanked both the TEKEG and the JPAC for putting these project proposals forward and shared that he was looking forward to updates on both projects. Finally, he reiterated the importance of continuing to integrate TEK into CEC activities and thanked the TEKEG members for their invaluable contributions. He shared that Canada was committed to advancing the preservation of TEK and that no relation was more important than the one between Canada and Indigenous Peoples.

Mexico's CEC Alternate Representative Miguel Ángel Zerón thanked the ministers and invited them to approach the desk and sign the ministerial statement.

Item 10: Closing Remarks by the United States

Administrator Regan thanked his Canadian and Mexican counterparts for the discussions of these two days. He stated that the partnership between Canada, Mexico, and the United States was stronger than ever and that there was an opportunity to seize this moment. He finished by reiterating his gratitude to Mexico for having hosted such a wonderful event.

Item 11: Concluding Remarks and Passing the Baton by Mexico

Undersecretary Jiménez Reyes thanked all participants for their contributions to the discussions, as well as Administrator Regan and Minister Guilbeault. He expressed his hope that they had enjoyed the activities and the visit to Mexican communities. The importance of going directly to communities and listening to them as they described their fight to protect their environment every day could not be overstated, he felt. He concluded by stating that he was sure that all three Council members looked forward to continuing to work jointly to protect the North American environment.

Item 12: Closing Remarks by Canada and Announcement of 2023 Council Session

Minister Guilbeault thanked Mexico for hosting a successful 2022 CEC Council Session and for their work to chair the meetings over the past year, as well as for everyone who contributed to the productive and fruitful discussions. He shared that he was encouraged by the progress made by the CEC this year and proud that it continues to be a relevant and important model of cooperation between nations. Minister Guilbeault then announced that the 30th annual CEC Council Session will take place in British Columbia in 2023. He stated that Canada was honored to be taking over the important role of Council chair for the next year and helping advance CEC efforts on ambitious climate actions as well as environmental protection and conservation. Minister Guilbeault then shared some of Canada's domestic environmental priorities that they hope to further in the coming year with the CEC. These include Indigenous stewardship in environmental conservation, a transition toward a low-carbon economy, and community-led education. Minister Guilbeault concluded by stating he was confident that the conversations of the past days had resulted in a better understanding of the essential role communities play in educating the world on environmental issues and that they will continue to build on these conversations throughout the coming year.