

# The end of sustainability

*Simon Brascoupe*

*Director, Aboriginal Affairs Directorate,  
Environment Canada,  
Room 2201, 10 Wellington Street  
Gatineau, QC K1A 0H3, Canada  
Email: Simon.Brascoupe@ec.gc.ca*

## THE ORIGINAL INSTRUCTIONS

At the beginning of time the Creator gave all Peoples original instructions. As humans we had a role to play in creation. We gave thanks and showed respect to all life that gives us life. When we collected plants, hunted, and fished, we thanked the Creator and creation. As the Sun obeys the original instructions of the Creator by rising in the East and

setting in the West, Indigenous Peoples follow their instructions.

Today, this way of life is misunderstood and under attack. We are rapidly edging towards the end of sustainability.

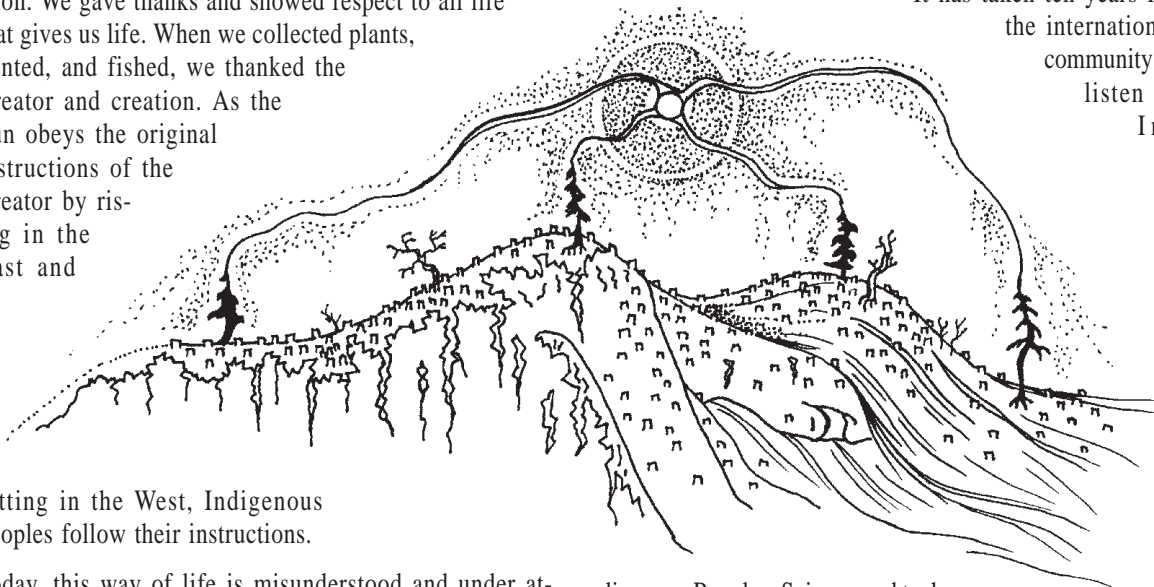
## LOSS OF KNOWLEDGE = END OF SUSTAINABILITY

The loss of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge spells the end of sustainability. Today, we are witnessing increasing and massive threats to the world's biological diversity, the loss of habitat, and the constant dispossession of Indigenous Peoples from their traditional lands. In the last century, the world lost 4,000 of its 10,000 languages. It is predicted that 50% of these languages, which are primarily from the Americas and Australia, are now threatened with extinction. They are not being taught to the next generation. Accompanying the extinction of these languages will be the loss of Indigenous knowledge of the world's ecosystems. In Canada, for example, only 3 of 53 Indigenous languages are expected to survive into the next century. These are Cree, Inuktitut, and Ojibway. This loss of bi-linguistic diversity and Indigenous knowledge is akin to the burning of the library of Alexandria.

Global culture and Western philosophy maintain a "use it or lose it" approach to development. Indigenous territo-

ries are viewed as opportune locales for mega-project development, resource extraction, and commercialization. This is not sustainable. Indigenous Peoples' knowledge of the land and the sustainable use of her resources should be the cornerstones to teaching and guiding environmental sustainability. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) acknowledges this and seeks the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity for humanity's benefit. The CBD, also, recognizes that Indigenous Peoples need to participate in order to meet these objectives.

It has taken ten years for the international community to listen to In-



Mother Earth with bare hills and tree stumps. (Art by Christi Belcourt).

igenous Peoples. Science and technology are fundamentally limited in their scope and ability to solve the current environmental crisis. Their linear approach is juxtaposed to the holistic interpretations of Indigenous Peoples who seek to maintain a delicate balance between the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. Consumerism, which is the soul that feeds present-day neo-liberal regimes, contrasts with the spiritual connection to the land that is at the heart of Indigenous Peoples' philosophies and traditional practices. For the industrial world, there are many obstacles that cloud sustainable development and sustainable decisions. This challenge will be inherited by future generations.

## THE SEVENTH GENERATION PROPHECY

The Seventh Generation prophecy points to the day when the world will learn and understand the concept of sustainability as envisioned by Indigenous Peoples. The signs of trouble will be spelled out when the water is not suitable to drink, the air hurts the eyes, and the world is covered in black snakes. Indeed these signs are upon us! Indigenous Peoples say that we are now entering a new era when the world will begin to listen. Let this be so.