Integrative Strategies Forum

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During this week we have spent time discussing the detrimental impacts of plastics in both human health and the environment. But we have spent even more time discussing things of no relevance to tackle the true scale of plastic pollution. Just today, the UN general secretary acknowledged that plastics are fossil fuels in another form, and pose a serious threat to human rights, the climate and biodiversity.

What we still haven’t mentioned is the devastating loss of ancestral, traditional and cultural heritage and knowledge caused by plastics as an extension of colonialism. The plastic industry has systemically replaced traditional zero waste, reuse and refill systems that existed at the core of our values and cultures by creating and forcing upon us a dependence on plastics. The plastic crisis is not only directly connected to the climate crisis and to biodiversity loss. It is also connected to social inequities, systemic racism, systemic erasure and waste colonialism. In that sense plastics are so much more than a danger to our health and the health of the environment. They are a danger to our cultural diversity and to our ancestral traditional systems. Systems that during millennia operated in alignment and balance with the environment.

That’s why in terms of sequencing, we feel it is important to acknowledge the contribution of our community at each stage of the negotiations.

I believe there is a serious conflict of interests having the industry being part of the negotiations. So I invite the communities most affected by this crisis, including those within the United States, to continue to hold industry accountable and to not let them distract you with false solutions that will only perpetuate cultural erasure and environmental injustices.

There’s no place for toxic plastics or bioplastics in a truly circular economy. In order to achieve systemic transformation through a truly circular economy, we must reclaim, protect and promote traditional and ancestral systems. The knowledge of our communities will be crucial in the mitigation of the triple crisis: climate change, biodiversity loss and plastic pollution.

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