

*The following is a transcription of the keynote talk given by Chief Oren Lyons at FORUM2021.*

I began with our instruction. Now I'm just talking specifically about the Haudenosaunee, Six Nations, Iroquois Confederacy. I can't speak for the whole Indigenous Peoples' of North, Central and South America, although we are very, very similar on almost everything. So specifically, I'm speaking on behalf of the Haudenosaunee, more commonly known as the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy. Haudenosaunee means the People of the Longhouse. So then this discussion on food, this discussion on life-sustaining elements that we are absolutely dependent upon, has been recognized by us for many, many years. And we have taken our relationship, on understanding, to a relationship that we have, personified a lot of the natural world elements to instruct our people more closely. So the term Mother Earth, Our Mother, is a way of us showing respect. We know who our mother is, but we have personified these elements so that our relationship can be closer. And the invaders from across the ocean misunderstood this completely and they call us animist, that we worship animals. We don't worship animals. We respect them. And we include them and we understand they are part of our family. And what we have is a great responsibility for their welfare, because they're the sustaining element for all life. You know, we're looking at a demise, an existential crisis of survival as a species. And that's because of the greed that is driving commerce and the amoral position that commerce has taken about anything spiritual. So I'm instructing you now about how we think and how wrong, how absurdly wrong, your leaders were, your Christian leaders were in calling us animists. So understanding that and understanding that the human beings are a species like the hales are a species and the krill of the sea are a species, all are life. Well, human beings are also a species, but we've been given, as I said before, the

responsibility of intellect and the foreknowledge of death, huge, huge responsibility. And we're in a situation today that is extremely dangerous for our future generations. And in that regard, when we were being instructed by the Great Peacemaker, he said to us very directly, when you sit and you console for the welfare of the people, think not of yourself, nor of your family, or even your generation. He said, make your decisions upon those generations coming so that they may have and enjoy what you have today. That's a serious instruction onto seven generations. And he's talking about the 80 year generations, not the shortcut that you've made a 20 year generation. That's not a generation, that's a shortcut and that's caused some problems, caused your system a problem, right? Engaging, full length and post-strike of anything. So here we are. And we are family, whether we're black, white, yellow, or we come in all colors, you know, just like the dogs. The dogs come in, all colors, but they're all dogs, all colors, all shapes, all sizes. Well humans are the same way. They come in, all colors, all shapes, all sizes, but we're family, a family that white brothers have challenged. And so there's a hierarchy that's been developed on race and you can see the problems that we're facing in the United States today on the race, the underlying element of racism that came across on the Nina, the Pinta, the Santa Maria - racism, the superiority of our white brothers sisters. Well, here we are. We don't have a lot of time. And so we should now begin to discuss how to survive. There are two laws that prevail, we call them laws. And the first one is respect, respect for yourself and have respect for all life around. You have respect for everything. And it's baked into our processes and our procedure. We come and visit all of that, respect is the first thing. And and of course the second element is to be thankful, to be thankful for what you have, not to ask for stuff, but to be thankful for what you have and appreciate that. Cause it's, it's a great deal. It's a lot. And so in a common cause now what you have organized shares this discussion because this is a big problem. We're in a serious,

serious problem, the earth is heating up. It's not going to slow down unless we change our direction completely. I believe that's the discussion that's going on now. How do you change this direction? I understand completely why you're calling this meeting because we're in dire straits and we have squandered time. There's no way you're going to gain back those 20 years that we could have done something better. And finally, finally, the scientists who knew about this finally make the statement, the term, they call global warming, which is a soft term. Actually, we're in an existential crisis. It's not warming, it is heat. It is gaining, it's compounding. So from my perspective, we're facing two compounds on this Earth today that are very, natural law, they are part of the natural law and very difficult to deal with. You know, the first compound I'm talking about is the human population. I'm not an expert on anything, but I do do a lot of observations. And when I was 20 years old, it was 1950. There were approximately 2.5 billion people in the whole world. And it took a long time to get to that number. Thousands of years before human reached 2.5 billion. Well, here we are 70 years later and there's almost 8; 7.7 or 7.8 right now I would say, and compounding, exploding soon to be a billion. Now that's a problem because the Earth's resources are finite. And of course the adjudication of resources around the Earth is not equally passed out. So in some places like the Far East, the Middle East, there's no water, they're fighting. It's amazing that they're fighting each other, killing each other. And yet the water. What are you going to do? India, the temperature's going out of sight. India has not prepared. China billion people in one place. The resource is damaged. Here where the Haudenosaunee is, which is our Homeland, which is New York, upstate New York, probably the Northeast. That's our Homeland. We're probably in the best place there is to be because we're in this, what they call the Great Lakes, a source of fresh water, that exists nowhere else in the world like that. I understand that there's at least a quarter of the world's

pottable water in the Great Lakes. I mean people are coming for it. People are coming for their water. They're going to need it. So where are we going to do? So here we are. And I'm glad you're calling the meeting because that brings the issues forward. And governance has a great deal to do with it. And now we have a pandemic and our history, our Haudenosaunee history involves prophecies as well. And 1799 one of our leaders who was an alcoholic, trying to bring back some respect and stop drinking. And he was given a message that, of course, spiritual beings, this time, it was called 1799. The trees were still big here. The whole United States hadn't been devastated. They hadn't killed off all the buffaloes yet. They hadn't killed off all the passenger pigeons yet. They hadn't killed off all the native people yet, 1790, but they were moving in that direction. And at that time, 1799, we were instructed that it would occur. So we know, here it is, we were foretold. When I grew up I was just you know, I grew up, I guess, a very fortunate kid, although we were poor by the standards of the white people we were poor, but we had a strong community, we were very rich in that. We had relationship, we had uncles, and nephews, and grandpas, and grandmas, and everybody was responsible for everybody. And as a kid, I could run through any house on the Reservation and I would get patted on the head. Everyone would say, well, who's your folks, who's your mother. First thing they asked us, "Who's your mother, who's your father?" And the time to eat wherever you were, sit down and eat. That was a community. That's how we operated, strong community. And that community extended into the natural world. It included the deer. It included the fish, it included everything that grows, to medicine. And then our prayers or our recognition every day, every morning, giving thanks for all those elements. So here we are now. And this is a common cause for human survival. So how do we go forward? And that's the question that I don't have an answer to except, we have to meet the challenge and we're quite willing to do that. I mean our leadership is

looking for allies, always have been looking for allies. So here we are glad you give the opportunity to say what I can say. Cause I was thinking, it gives a perspective that people haven't been looking at. So that's where we are. It ain't over yet. It's all hands on deck, all hands on deck.