A Retrospective Celebration
June 2017–June 2020
Dear Friends,

Warm greetings to all my Indigenous sisters and brothers around the world, and our allies. Our thoughts and sympathies are with those of us who have lost loved ones, and leaders, to COVID-19. In addition to these tolls and challenges to our health, the pandemic has exacerbated centuries of institutionalized racism, colonialism, and discrimination against Indigenous peoples. In light of all we are going through, Nia Tero’s necessary work to support Indigenous peoples in the protection of their rights and territories is as important as ever. Nia Tero has proven to be a remarkable ally against so many difficult fronts we Indigenous peoples are facing whether it be COVID-19, land invasions, physical violence, or political attacks eroding our rights.

I am often asked what makes Nia Tero different from other partners, funders, or allies of Indigenous peoples. For me, it is Nia Tero’s unwavering commitment to working alongside Indigenous peoples on their own terms, supporting their Indigenous partners’ right to self-determination, and working within the framework of, and guided by, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In addition to supporting self-governance of Indigenous territories, Nia Tero’s commitment to Indigenous rights and sovereignty also shapes its global policy work. As the UN considers its next set of biodiversity targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity, Nia Tero is partnering with Indigenous leaders from around the world to assure their meaningful participation in how those targets are finalized, and what they say. These decisions will impact how governments around the world approach the challenge of maintaining global biodiversity, including on Indigenous territories. Whether at the UN, nationally, or locally, no decision-making about Indigenous peoples is valid if it does not include Indigenous peoples at the table.

Nia Tero’s steadfast commitment to Indigenous rights and self-determination motivates me in my role as board chair. I am proud of what Nia Tero has achieved in its first few years. But I am even more excited about the potential, looking forward.

In solidarity with and appreciation of all who are contributing to the ongoing struggle for the rights of Indigenous peoples,

Vicky Tauli-Corpuz
Historically, cultures across the world were founded in kinship and reciprocity between all life on Earth.

Today, we’ve almost completely lost sight of this foundation. Forests, oceans, and grasslands are enclosed and exploited, accelerating species extinctions, ecosystem destruction, and radical climatic shifts. But a glimmer of hope exists. Despite pressure from extractive industries, Indigenous peoples across the Earth are guardians to nearly a third of the planet, and their territories are largely vibrant and healthy.

Nia Tero’s purpose is simple: provide lasting support to Indigenous peoples protecting their homelands from colonization and destruction; and share Indigenous methods of care for the land with non-Indigenous communities. Our Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff are designing legal and policy frameworks around kinship and self governance, and supporting multiple networks of Indigenous peoples to find solutions for the threats to their territories. We’re working closely with Indigenous storytellers to elevate Indigenous knowledge systems and rights, and exploring innovative technology to reduce countless threats to Indigenous peoples. We hope this work inspires an understanding that ensuring Earth’s viability means respecting Indigenous sovereignty and wisdom.

Our first three years were devoted to building our team, earning the trust of Indigenous peoples, and launching our initial partnerships. Our effectiveness depends entirely upon the depth of trust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners, and Nia Tero. Our 50% Indigenous board brings a diversity of cultures, experiences, and relationships; as do our staff and consultants.

We’re off to a strong start with a deep focus on supporting Indigenous peoples in the northern Amazon, the islands across the Pacific, and the remote communities of the boreal forests in Canada’s Northwest Territories. These communities maintain vast and healthy portions of the Earth, and understand what it takes to keep their homes healthy and thriving. Together, we can relearn how reciprocity and kinship between all beings are the most effective paths forward for humanity.

We welcome you to the world of Nia Tero.

Peter Seligmann
Regional Programs

BOREAL  AMAZONIA  PASIFIKA
PASIFIKA

The Pasifika region includes over 25,000 islands and the largest, deepest, most thriving ocean on Earth. Home to 1,200 distinct Indigenous cultures, this is the most bioculturally diverse region in the world.

Currently, Pasifika faces massive threats from industrial logging, mining, and fishing; and dominance of globalized culture endangers Indigenous ways.

Collaborations with Pasifika guardians grew from the aspirations of Solomon Islands communities to protect their forested high places, and aim for whole-domain Indigenous management of the ocean. Led by a diverse Pasifika-based team, the program strategy weaves together three pillars: Islands, Ocean, and Identity. We’re working alongside Pasifika peoples to strengthen guardianship of sacred Island homelands—Sky Islands and Atolls—to sustain the bountiful ocean, at scale; and to elevate a collective, diverse, reciprocity-based regional identity to amplify and secure a self-determined vision for a thriving Pasifika.

Momentum is building. In the Solomon Islands, the Government’s Sky Island Pledge protecting forested areas above 400m (20% of land area) has been amplified through beautiful and compelling Indigenous storytelling, inspiring grassroots action and proliferation into Vanuatu, Kanaky, and PNG.

In the Cook Islands, Indigenous guardians are strengthening the Marae Moana whole marine domain protected area by reconnecting youth with Māori values, knowledge, and practice and by designing customary and government co-management at big ocean scale. Alongside this and a wave of other advances in ocean guardianship, the Polynesian Voyaging Society is preparing to embark on a pan-Pacific voyage where we are partnering in a world-facing campaign—the Third Canoe—that will showcase Pasifika solutions for a thriving future. And, in one of our more recent and promising initiatives, key partners are exploring a new approach to ocean guardianship based on Ocean Kinship—that is, incorporating Pacific Peoples’ ancestral concepts of kinship with the living world into policy and legal action to transform governance of the world’s largest ocean.
Indigenous peoples in Northern Amazonia are securing the survival of the greatest continuous tropical rainforests in the world.

Nia Tero’s 10 year goal in Amazonia is to contribute to Indigenous peoples’ efforts to maintain guardianship of 60 million hectares of thriving forest, by exercising territorial rights and asserting their own vision of wellbeing. To achieve this goal, our efforts are focused on working with Indigenous peoples in Northern Amazonia, and supporting the rights of Indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation.

We’re supporting initiatives in Northern Brazil, South Suriname, Western Guyana, and Eastern Colombia. Currently, we’re contributing to the efforts of 17 Indigenous organizations, and five of their trusted partners. Our regional advisors are guiding us in this process. We support Indigenous organizations committed to protecting their territories, strengthening their governance, fortifying their communications, and maintaining cultural continuity and intergenerational exchange, such as Apitikaxi and Apiwa in the Tumucumaque Indigenous Land. Our work also involves supporting Indigenous organizations committed to ensuring the survival of their uncontacted relatives, such as UNIVAJA in the Javari Valley.

We recognize that to achieve our goals, Indigenous peoples need allies such as Nia Tero to advance policy work, particularly on issues related to recognition of land rights, upholding existing rights, and solidifying appropriate government response to COVID-19. Thus, we are supporting Indigenous organizations, such as the VIDS in Suriname, in their policy related work. As Indigenous leaders face direct threats to their lives, we’ve collaborated with Indigenous partners, such as OPIAC in Colombia, to set up rapid response mechanisms for Indigenous people under threat. Finally, as Nia Tero’s focus is amplifying Indigenous voices through storytelling, we’re supporting the development of documentaries in Brazil about the Yanomami, and about Indigenous Peoples’ response to COVID-19.
The boreal forests of North America’s northernmost regions are among the world’s most expansive, containing over one-quarter of Earth’s remaining intact forests and massive stores of carbon.

These are all within the territories of Indigenous peoples who interweave identity, culture, and guardianship of thriving communities of life at a continental scale.

At nearly 30 million hectares, Sahtu territory is one of the largest in the boreal; threatened by demand for oil and gas, wood fiber, and commercial fishing. Alongside the Indigenous Leadership Initiative (ILI) we’re supporting Sahtu efforts to secure national support and guardianship of their territory. In September 2019, Canada’s Nature Fund approved initial funding of US$1.9 Million for three proposals submitted by Sahtu for the establishment of Indigenous Protected Areas. With secure co-financing and committed Sahtu leadership, Nia Tero is providing multi-year support for Sahtu guardianship as a foundation for their nationhood.

In early 2020, Nia Tero partnered on video production with James Cameron, Harrison Ford, Peter Seligmann, and Nainoa Thompson for ILI’s Land Needs Guardians campaign. The success of this campaign lends momentum to work with the Government of Canada, ensuring Indigenous guardianship is recognized and supported within post-2020 Biodiversity, Climate, and Sustainable Development Goals. These partnerships have enabled us to amplify government support for Indigenous guardianship within Canada, and globally.
Wayfinders Circle

Through a joint effort with Pawanka Fund and the Council of Spiritual Elders, Nia Tero is also engaging with the Achuar Nation of Ecuador and the Wampis Nation of Peru. Our goal is to continue supporting their guardianship efforts, so they can share and inspire people around the globe, while highlighting the power of indigenous guardianship.

Worldwide Indigenous leaders, our advisory council, and board members have conveyed to us that Indigenous guardianship is actively occurring in many places, but the greatest challenge is access to unrestricted funds. With the guidance of the Council of Spiritual Elders, Nia Tero and Pawanka Fund designed the Wayfinders Circle, a network established to unleash the transformative potential of Indigenous lifeways, inspiring all people to re-imagine development, conservation, and their relationships to each other and Mother Earth.

To create the Wayfinders Circle, we’ve initiated partnerships with Indigenous peoples from Canada, the United States, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Peru, Sápmi in Sweden, Indonesia, Kenya, and Australia; and we expect future partnerships will form. We anticipated an in-person launch of the Wayfinders Circle in 2020, however our plans have shifted due to COVID-19. We’ve held meetings with the initial Wayfinders Circle participants and expect to have an online launch in November 2020.

Biocultural Monitoring System

Since the end of 2019, Nia Tero has been working with Conservation Metrics, Terras App, and Tui Shortland—a Māori expert on biocultural metrics—on the development of a mission-aligned monitoring system for our place-anchored partnerships.

This system aims to support our Indigenous partners’ efforts to track how and whether their people and places are thriving based on their self-determined vision and priorities. To do so, the system integrates biocultural metrics of well-being based on the self-determined vision of our Indigenous partners.

A beta-version of the system is ready and we are currently piloting the system in two territories in Amazonia. We hope to expand the application of the biocultural monitoring systems to other territories in Amazonia and Pasifika during 2021.
As part of Nia Tero’s birth and the gathering of our founding partners, we selected several promising initiatives that provide tangible examples of the power of Indigenous guardianship.

The Blue Abadi Fund was one of these initial engagements, and is dedicated to permanently supporting local community and government co-management of marine resources within the Bird’s Head Seascape, West Papua Indonesia.

The Bird’s Head Seascape is the single greatest reservoir of tropical marine species on the planet, all within the customary lands and waters of Indigenous Papuan peoples. From its inception, one of the biggest challenges for the Blue Abadi Fund is to provide long-term equitable access and strengthen capacity for Indigenous West Papuan peoples and organizations who are the original and enduring guardians of their customary lands and sea.

Nia Tero made a founding commitment to Blue Abadi that has played an essential role in establishing the fund. More recently, our financial commitment has enabled us to gain a seat on the Governance Committee and to work with other funders and members of the committee to revise the operations manual of the fund, and the governance structures associated with its grantmaking, to enhance access by Indigenous West Papuan groups who live within and manage resources within the Seascape.

Moving ahead, we look forward to continuing this work alongside members of the Governance Committee and other Blue Abadi constituencies to ensure that the fund’s function serves marine co-management goals while enhancing Indigenous West Papuan food security, livelihoods, identity, and culture.
As Nia Tero concludes its third year as an organization, we’re excited to celebrate a story of tremendous growth across our revenue, partnerships, team, and programs.

As we close 2020, we’re honored to be part of a global community of regional partners and collaborators with an expansive array of Indigenous-led programs and programming centered on storytelling and reciprocity.

**BOARD EVOLUTION**
*From our first year to the present*

In our founding year of 2017, we held just nine board positions, a third of which was Indigenous membership. In 2020 we now have a 50% Indigenous board with a total of 10 members.

**2020: 50% Indigenous**
- 10 Members, 5 Indigenous.

**2019**
- 8 Members, 3 Indigenous.

**2018**
- 9 Members, 3 Indigenous.

**2017**
- 9 Members, 3 Indigenous.

**TEAM GROWTH**
*From 5 to 28 in 4 years*

In 2017, our foundational staff was a cohort of only five; and now we are a thriving hub of 28 team members.

**GRANTS**
*58 Grants in 2020 and support continues*

Halfway through the year, we’ve already distributed 58 grants for 2020, and we anticipate we’ll surpass the 69 grants we distributed in 2019, for an estimated total of 120–145 grants in 2020. Of these, 28 have been COVID response grants.

It is because of the generous contributions from our donors and partners, that we’ve been able to fund our departments and programs. We are proud of the hard work our partners, team, and board have accomplished to increase our revenue and our programs. As we move forward, ongoing contributions will help ensure Nia Tero is able to continue our support of Indigenous-led efforts towards a sustainable future for all.
In 2018, Nia Tero launched the Leadership Fellows Program for Indigenous leaders.

The initial Fellows included Mandy Bayha, Jupta Itoewaki, Liam Kokaua, and Ryan Hawley; all intergenerational bridge-builders in their communities. Nia Tero was eager to co-design this program with the Fellows who, throughout 2019, each invited two peers to participate in three leadership training sessions held in Indigenous territories in Ecuador, Mexico, and Kyrgyzstan.

The Leadership Fellows program serves a few important purposes: it focuses on the needs of the Fellows and their communities, strengthens culture and spirituality, promotes intergenerational and intercultural exchanges, involves peer groups and regional cohorts, and shares a learning-by-doing approach with partners.

While the presence of COVID-19 continues to impact our efforts, we’re making sure to prioritize the safety and wellness of our team.

Our response includes initiating the Incident Management Team (IMT) for weekly planning and tracking of the situation, daily surveillance of COVID-19 ‘hot spots’, mitigating travel, and triaging decisions on sponsored events. As the effects of the pandemic are sure to continue across all aspects of our work, all key convenings have been moved or canceled, and we are closely monitoring potential impact on future events.

Our core ethos is to take guidance from Indigenous leadership, trusted regional institutions, and experts in fields relevant to our actions. In support of our multiple regional partners, we’ve collaborated on several direct action responses to COVID-19. Initially, the impact of this disease on individuals, families, and communities was overshadowed by rapid economic and social shifts, resulting from response to the pandemic’s threat to essential organizations and social infrastructure. Going forward, our COVID-oriented efforts will shift to integrate strategies that uphold the strength of our key partners, and foster the conditions most essential to the well-being of those we serve, to enhance our collective vision for change.

Nia Tero has provided COVID-19 relief in the Amazon since the pandemic arose in March 2020. By September 2020, 68% of the funds were directed towards Indigenous organizations, and 32% were directed to trusted partners of Indigenous peoples. These funds were used to:

- Purchase health supplies and food for Indigenous Peoples
- Support territorial protection from invaders (e.g. mining, logging)
- Strengthen Indigenous Peoples legal departments & communications efforts
- Support legislative action and advocacy
- Support efforts to address violence against Indigenous Peoples

Skilling Up the Future

In 2018, Nia Tero launched the Leadership Fellows Program for Indigenous leaders.

In a 2020 collaboration with Indigenous elders, we met with the first Leadership Fellows cohort to receive guidance on how to strengthen the Leadership Fellows Program. We modeled it after Indigenous teaching methods and concepts of leadership, with the goal of strengthening emergent leaders from Nia Tero’s place-anchored partnerships.

Though COVID-19 impacted the progress of our program, we’re quickly advancing on developing curricula for each priority region, and have hired a Leadership Fellows Manager who will be fully dedicated to rolling out the program in the Amazonia, Pasifika, and Boreal regions.
Our storytelling journey begins in April 2019, when our guiding principle of **reciprocity** was established at a brain trust meeting in Seattle.

Storytelling builds community, creative partnerships, strategies, and communications with an emphasis on establishing credibility with Indigenous peoples and organizations. Our dynamic framework supports and amplifies Indigenous storytellers to fortify and complement global policy priorities and strategies in the Pasifika, Northern Amazonia, and Boreal regions; as well as the Wayfinders Circle and an overarching network of Indigenous creatives.

**Partnerships with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are core to the work of the Storytelling Team.** Since August 2019, Nia Tero has formalized working partnerships rooted in shared commitments, co-financing, and aligned vision. In regard to the Creative Fellowships, the team is working with the prestigious Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, Seattle International Film Festival (the largest film festival in North America and Oscar contending), Camden International Film Festival, ImagineNative Film Festival, and the Berlinale Film Festival. Other partnerships include Emerson Collective, Anonymous Content, and Upstander Project.

This year, Storytelling announced **four 2020 Fellowships supporting 24 artists, culture bearers, storytellers, and filmmakers** who embody the mission of Nia Tero (see column at right). We aspire to co-collaborate with these Fellows by providing supportive platforms, networking, and project development. Each individual brings new awareness to their communities and peoples in our efforts to protect cultures, the environment, and resources. Additionally, Nia Tero’s growing social media presence further engages the work of Indigenous creative and organizational leaders who are shifting social and cultural narratives in relationship to the environment.

**Nia Tero is also eager to launch the Leadership and Creative Fellowships now, when millions of cultural workers are experiencing significant income loss due to COVID-19.** Even as Indigenous populations are being hit especially hard by the pandemic, Indigenous cultural workers are rallying to provide solace and sustenance during isolation. Whether through video streaming, socially distanced powwows, creatively crafted masks, virtual beading circles, free coloring pages, or educational activities for kids; artists are finding new and innovative ways of connecting us together. It is clearer now, more than ever, that art and culture are critically important to the well-being of Indigenous peoples, which in turn ensures the health of the lands we help steward.
ABOUT NIA TERÓ

Mission: Securing Indigenous guardianship of vital ecosystems.

Identity Statement
We are a US-based non-profit working alongside Indigenous peoples and movements worldwide. Our governing bodies, leadership and staff are of diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous identities and life experiences. We view this diversity as a source of our strength as a bridging institution, committed to an antiracist and inclusive culture centering Indigenous rights, wisdom, practices, world views and protocols.

Reciprocity Definition
Nia Tero views reciprocity as the way of life that centers mutual exchange and sharing amongst all beings, past, present and future, seen and unseen, and the Earth.

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