FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Indigenous Leaders to Confront Water Scarcity Facing Native Communities Across the United States

New York, November 14, 2026 — Nearly half of homes on Native American reservations lack reliable water, clean drinking water or basic sanitation, according to estimates cited by the Universal Access to Clean Water for Tribal Communities initiative. On Thursday, November 19, the G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20), the world's leading organization focused on the intersection of faith and policy, will bring together Indigenous scientists, researchers and community leaders for "Water Scarcity in Indigenous Communities of the United States," a Native American Heritage Month webinar presented by the IF20 Anti-Racism Initiative with the International Academy for Multicultural Cooperation, Honor the Earth and the Seventh Generation Fund for Indigenous Peoples.

Haudenosaunee environmental engineer Shannon Seneca, whose work centers on drinking water treatment and groundwater contamination, said the conversation has to begin with how water itself is understood.

"Water is not a resource. Water is more than life. Water *is* creation," Seneca said.

The causes of water scarcity vary from one Native community to the next. Many nations were forcibly relocated to arid lands, cutting them off from reliable supplies and disrupting traditional water management. Others contend with drought, inadequate or absent infrastructure, and contamination from mining and agriculture. On the Navajo Nation, more than 500 abandoned uranium mines have contributed to groundwater contamination, and many residents depend on private wells containing uranium and arsenic, contaminants linked to gastrointestinal illness, certain cancers and chronic disease.

Keeley Joe, a citizen of the Navajo Nation and project coordinator at the Universal Access to Clean Water for Tribal Communities initiative, said the goal is a basic one.

"Every Native American has the right to clean, safe, affordable water in the home, supporting a healthy, dignified, and thriving quality of life," Joe said. "The Universal Access to Clean Water for Tribal Communities initiative is working towards that."

Krystal Two Bulls, executive director of Honor the Earth, joins the panel with frontline experience organizing for Indigenous sovereignty and environmental justice. Panelists will discuss why access to clean water is a human right, examine the root causes of water scarcity across Native territories, assess the efforts underway to close the gap and what still needs to be done, and consider how Indigenous allies and faith leaders can help.

Moderator Ja:no's—Janine Bowen of the Seneca Nation pointed to the Flint, Michigan, water crisis, which drew national headlines and spurred federal legislators into action, as a measure of the attention Native communities have not received.

"Yet, many Indigenous communities throughout the United States continue to wait for safe water," Bowen said. "When will this injustice be addressed at a systemic level?"

The webinar will take place on Zoom on Thursday, November 19, 2026, at 10 a.m. HST / 12 p.m. PST / 1 p.m. MST / 2 p.m. CST / 3 p.m. EST. Bowen will moderate. Register at bit.ly/water-scarcity-indigenous.

Speakers will include:

- **Ja:no's—Janine Bowen (Moderator)** — Director of Seneca Language Teacher Support and Community Outreach for the Seneca Nation. A member of the Beaver Clan and a Faith Keeper of the Cold Spring Longhouse, she has devoted her career to Seneca language revitalization, beginning in 2002 as a teacher on the Allegany Territory. She serves on the G20 Interfaith Forum's Anti-Racism Initiative and the Seneca Nation's Natural Resources Committee, and she holds degrees from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and the Harvard Kennedy School.
- **Shannon Seneca, PhD** — Assistant Professor of Indigenous Studies at the University at Buffalo. A Six Nations Mohawk (Turtle Clan) environmental engineer, she specializes in drinking water treatment, geochemistry, contaminant hydrology and groundwater remediation, and in 2012 became the first Native American woman to earn a PhD in engineering at the University at Buffalo. She spent nearly a decade as environmental health director for the Seneca Nation Health System and has also served as assistant faculty with the Center for Indigenous Cancer Research at Roswell Park.
- **Keeley Joe** — Project Coordinator at Universal Access to Clean Water for Tribal Communities, an initiative dedicated to ensuring every Native American household has reliable access to clean, safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation. A member of the Navajo Nation, she researches the environmental impacts of uranium mining and water contamination on Indigenous communities. She holds an M.A. in Cultural Anthropology from Idaho State University, where she also taught anthropology, and previously worked as a park ranger at Craters of the Moon National Monument.
- **Krystal Two Bulls** — Executive Director of Honor the Earth, an Indigenous-led organization dedicated to protecting the lifeways and sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples. Oglala Lakota and Northern Cheyenne, she is a grassroots organizer and veteran whose work centers on sovereignty, LANDBACK and cross-movement relationship building, and she previously directed NDN Collective's LANDBACK Campaign.

About the G20 Process

The Group of Twenty, or G20, is the premier forum for international economic cooperation, bringing together the leaders of Earth's most prosperous economies. Collectively, G20 members represent around 80 percent of the world's economic output, two-thirds of the global population and three-quarters of international trade. Throughout the year, representatives from G20 countries gather to discuss financial and socioeconomic issues as well as broader humanitarian issues targeted by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

About the G20 Interfaith Forum

The G20 Interfaith Forum seeks global solutions by collaborating with religious thought leaders and political representatives to help shape the overall G20 agenda. It draws on the vital roles that religious institutions and beliefs play in world affairs, reflecting a rich diversity of institutions, ideas, and values. Through its extensive network of networks, it helps prioritize key global policy goals and point toward practical means of implementation at every level of society.

For more information, please visit www.g20interfaith.org.

About the International Academy for Multicultural Cooperation

The International Academy for Multicultural Cooperation (IAMC) is a platform for scholars, religious and faith leaders, activists and humanitarians from around the world who share the conviction that cooperative engagement across cultures and faith traditions can open new pathways toward peace, equality, justice and a healthy, sustainable world. Founded by Audrey E. Kitagawa, who also chairs the G20 Interfaith Forum's Anti-Racism Initiative, IAMC works to bring together an international coalition of thought leaders committed to human dignity and the well-being of all peoples, including the protection of Indigenous lives and rights.

For more information, please visit www.multiculturalcooperation.net.

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