

Charter for the Meeting on the Cultural Diversity of Ayahuasca

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Translation by Gayle and Danny Nemu

We intend, with this text that we are sending to the Meeting on the Cultural Diversity of Ayahuasca, to reiterate ICEFLU's official support of the request to list Ayahuasca / Santo Daime in the terms established by Decree 3551 of 08.04.2000, and also to state our position regarding the current stage of this process.

As everyone knows, this request was made almost simultaneously in Acre by Alto Santo, Barquinha, and the UDV, and by us in the state of Amazonas.

In a letter delivered to the Seminar on Ayahuasca and Public Policy held last year in Rio Branco, we expressed our opinion that the request sent by the state of Acre had two basic shortcomings:

- 1) it did not include representatives of indigenous nations, the ancestral holders of this heritage;
- 2) with respect to the ayahuasca religions, it excluded other traditional and relevant branches (including ours) from any prior consultation or discussion on the application.

The argument put forward by the proposing organizations in Rio Branco to justify the exclusion of other religions was based on the fact that they consider themselves the only "traditional" lines (though it would be more accurate to say "traditionalists").

The measure suggested as an interim solution to address this impasse, from the methodological point of view, is to place our religious tradition (Santo Daime in the line of Padrinho Sebastiao) in the "eclectic" category, which could be confused with, or lead to, another category, of "neoayahuasquero".

We could even understand our inclusion in "traditional / eclectic" category, as we have, along with our foundation in the doctrine, hymns, ritual and symbolism of Mestre, included such developments as mediumistic work, universalist ecumenism, environmental and community focus, and alliances with other traditions of sacred medicine.

But it would not be satisfactory for us to be classified as "neo-ayahuasqueiro," to the extent that this definition includes a wide spectrum of trends. And despite of our respect, appreciation and dialogue with many of these lines, with the inclusion of our group, this distances us from the content of our doctrine.

It is worth remembering that our spiritual tradition of Santo Daime, initiated by Padrinho Sebastião, has already been recognized by the state of Brazil as one of the four main traditions that had a seat on ayahuasca on the GMT / CONAD working group considering the ethical principles relevant for the religious use of ayahuasca.

And furthermore, it has deep roots in the traditional communities and peoples of the forest, both in its place of origin in Acre and in its development in the Amazon, as evidenced by the social and environmental work developed by our communities on the Mapiá River and the Purus and Juruá River basins.

But we are neither claiming the title of traditional or denying the label of eclectic. That would be to take the debate away from its real essence.

We understand that there are some differences in point of view between the various ayahuasca lines regarding the request for listing (in the form that was proposed), and consider this as a natural process.

A deeper approach to this phenomenon would not fit here, and would be the topic of another discussion. We would only suggest here that, in our view, the attempt to construct a "three field theory" (original, traditional and eclectic) represents more an attempt at a political exit than a rigorous methodology capable of tackling the difficult issue of the diversity of ayahuasca.

We could even leave to the anthropologists and social scientists the task of endorsing or reviewing these concepts and classifications; some have made excellent contributions to this debate. But in truth, for the churches and groups, the issue goes beyond mere academia, and has implications in the construction of their doctrinal and theological identities.

We see nothing wrong in successful social and political dialogue between traditionalist entities of Acre at the regional level. Rather, we recognize the legitimacy of this kind of liason, and the merit of this work at the regional level and even at the national level (in the case of the UDV). But hopefully this will not become a posture with hegemonic pretensions and therefore negative consequences for the whole process.

For this we are supporting this Meeting on the Cultural Diversity of Ayahuasca, regarding it not as a counterpoint but as a complement to the work being done by religious organizations of Acre.

Our great challenge is precisely to transcend any attachment to labels, origins and classifications, and define our common interests. For surely we all want to see our sacrament and the various elements of our cultural and artistic ritual as objects of state protection. As was mentioned at a conference on this topic, it is not for the state to 'list' anything, but to 'nourish' the genuine expressions of the social groups involved in this process.

The other issue raised by the proposed listing, that also seems to be common to all, is a closer link between our spiritual and religious traditions and departments of culture and education of the state, rather than with the Justice and institutional security departments.

We maintain that the cultural protection of the state should begin by summarizing the ancestral indigenous and pan-Amazonian origin of ayahuasca, along with its immemorial knowledge as a sacred medicine, and its role in the cosmogony and in knowledge of many indigenous groups native to the Western Amazon.

From this it would pass to the various folk healing and shamanic practices (not as strong here as in other countries) and from there to contemporary developments, covering both traditional and eclectic elements contained in the genuinely Brazilian and urban religious phenomenon of the Christian Daimista religions.

In our view, we consider ayahuasca culture to be established by the very fact of the sacramental beverage. This, together with the ritualized *feitio*, an authentic sacred alchemy, with its elaborate system of symbolic prescriptions and the beauty of its ceremony, should be at the heart of listing.

Given the same degree of importance are the *hinarrios*, the collections of devotional songs and music "received" through a channel of "mediumistic" inspiration, and which serve as the principle form of encoding spiritual teachings, especially in the Daime spiritual lines.

And finally the various ritual designs such as dance, which give a great beauty and spiritual density to the "work" of the various lines, like in other rituals with more specific formats.

Following this timeline, with the premise that spirituality is an ever-flowing spring and that culture as a whole is alive and dynamic, we must also take into account the latest sprouts from the roots of ayahuasca, which are the recombinations and reconfigurations of the doctrinal and ritualistic elements of more recent groups with a more independent character compared to traditional systems.

I think that these are key aspects that should illuminate the subject of our request.

We could also include the evaluation of issues that are secondary but significant, such as the richness of the symbolic construction of the founding myths of the communities involved, their oral history, the cultural collision and synthesis carried out with the expansion of the doctrines, the dissemination of Portuguese and of "caboclo" values around the world through the globalization of ayahuasca, etc..

We are able to and interested in systematizing our rich collection and contributing to the IPHAN inventory and other procedures aimed at giving support to state protection of ayahuasca culture in all its diverse manifestations.

And we are always open for dialogue, cultivating tolerance in the pursuit of obtaining positive results for the recognition of ayahuasca as a cultural asset of the forest, to be preserved for the future.

We hope that this process is for all of us a great opportunity for unity and dialogue, as well as the realization of *unity within diversity*. For, in acting in accordance with this understanding, we will be honoring the memory of the ancestral keepers of this cultural and spiritual treasures of ayahuasca. And also we will be correctly interpreting the precepts and teachings of the masters who founded and inspired our traditions.

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(*) Original in Portuguese available here:

http://www.idacefluris.org.br/sistema/imagem/noticia/a946__Carta_EncDivAhuaVersfinal.pdf