Hau, Mitakuyapi. Hello to all of my indigenous relatives from around Mother Earth. I extend my congratulations to our Chair, on his selection to guide this meeting.

My name is Taykilapewin (Most Beloved Woman), in English I am known as Larisa Harvey. I bring you greetings from the Fire Lightning Tiyospaye, at Wounded Knee, Lakota Nation, the site of the infamous massacre of our people at the hands of the United States military in December, 1890.

My relatives, I am here to address the question of so-called development in my homeland, that stretches from the Big Horn Mountains of Montana to the confluence of the Missouri and Platte Rivers – thousands of square miles that are recognized as Lakota territory through the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty between my nation and the United States of America.

Articles 3 and 32 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples are fundamentally important to my nation. Self-determination means that we possess the natural right to be independent of foreign occupation and domination, politically, economically, socially and culturally.

Despite this right, as clearly recognized under Article 3 of the Declaration, our territory is under occupation, to the degree that we have no so-called development in my homeland – what we have is the absolute worst poverty in the United States, we have the highest unemployment rate (over 85% in the winter), we have the worst infant mortality rate, the highest teen suicide rate, and the lowest life expectancy in North America – that is the state of OUR development.
Yesterday, in this very room, in the United States’ government self-congratulatory statement, the U.S. suggested that our troubles were rooted in “discrimination.” Simultaneously, the U.S. refused to acknowledge its own history of colonialism, genocide and occupation, and that these are the sources of our troubles – the violation of our treaty, the murder of our people, the stealing of our natural resources, the destruction of our language and culture, the complete denial of our right to self-determination – making discrimination pale by comparison.

Brothers and sisters, I am here today to tell you that development and self-determination are ideas that my Lakota relatives completely understood of long before our territories were invaded by those who would seek to destroy us. We lived in balance and harmony with one another, and with our environment. Our prayer, “Mitkuye Oyasin” (For All My Relations) is now mouthed around the globe, but our understanding of the interrelationship of life as expressed in that short term is ancient, and it reveals that “development” is not something that we take from the earth, or do to the earth. Rather, it reflects our deep partnership and respect for the earth.

The United States’ statement to this session concluded with the statement that the U.S. “stands ready to be judged by the results” of its policy. Good, because we fully intend to judge the United States by the results of its policy, just as we and the world will judge it by the results of its past policies. We fully intend to judge the United States by its compliance with the treaty that it signed with our people. We fully intend to judge the United States by its policy that allows transnational extractive industries to rape our territory and steal our resources, including our most sacred relative – the water. We fully intend to judge the United States and to hold it accountable for the destruction that it visits upon us, and allows others to visit upon us.

Sisters and Brothers, I am the 7th generation that my relative Fire Lightning was thinking of when he fought for our homeland against the invaders like the U.S. generals Custer and Crook and Sheridan. I am the 7th generation that they were starved and killed to prevent from even existing. I am that 7th generation who my ancestors believed would still have a love for our sacred He Sapa (Black Hills), and who would fight for them. To defend them against today’s Custer – who now have names like Exxon and Barrick and United Nuclear. I am that 7th Generation, and I rise to that responsibility, and I demand our right to self-determination, and respect for our treaty. And if there is any country or any power here who suggests that we surrender, or assimilate, or collaborate in the destruction of our people and our nation. I repeat, as did our ancestors before me, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER!