

Statement - Arramat Project - Robin Howse - Item 6

Waciye nitotemak kihatomiskatinawaw. Ninanaskomitin kise manitow mamotawimaw mamokawimaw anohc kakiskisak. Wapastim iskwew nitisiyihkason ohci niya Miawapukek Mikmaw maka niwikin maskwacisihk mekwac.

I am here representing the Arramat Project which focuses on Strengthening Health And Wellbeing through Indigenous-Led Conservation and Sustainable Relationships with Biodiversity. We want to strengthen Indigenous voices and capacities to document their knowledge from place-based projects.

My heartwork stems from the Pekiwe Cultural Lodge located in Maskwacis, Treaty 6 Territory, in what is now known as Alberta, Canada. The research that I am currently engaged in is titled, *Pekiwe VPV: Coming Home: Healing Through Land and Cultural Reclamation*, and it aims to show the interconnections between ecological health and human health and wellbeing.

In order to have healthy people and communities, we need to be able to have access to and jurisdiction over clean lands and waters. The land and waters are our life source, it is our substance, our pharmacy, and our teacher. To be able to maintain our ways of being, our ceremonies, and our languages, we must be able to have access to healthy lands and waters for land-based education and healing practices.

Land-based learning is one of the most critical forms of education for Indigenous peoples. There are many forms of land-based activities that are educational, healing, and enact the inherent sovereignty of our Nations. The land provides for our spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing. Whether it is in the form of traditional spiritual and cultural practices such as ceremony, or through local Indigenous food systems, or subsistence practices of hunting and gathering, or physical activities such as hide tanning and horsemanship. In order to maintain sovereignty, we need to be self-sufficient, and that requires land.

A quote from a Cree Elder within the Arramat Project captures this question perfectly: "If the land is not healthy, how can we be?" – Whapmagoostui Cree Elder

Many Indigenous communities, especially grassroots groups, are often denied access and use to lands and waters in their traditional territories.

The denial of access to Indigenous homelands can occur through many avenues. In the context of my research, it is happening through colonially constructed government bodies, international corporations and organizations such as oil companies, and remediation and reclamation contractors.

I recommend:

- To member States to implement a meaningful and effective Free Prior and Informed Consent of Indigenous Peoples with the inclusion of Grassroots groups, community members, especially Elders, Youth, and Women with a report of progress of this provided at the next session.