

**Statement by Alex White Plume
on Behalf of Owe Aku Tiospaye,
American Indian Law Alliance, Seventh Generation Fund, and Tonatierra**

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**Agenda Item #2, Millenium Development Goals, Education
Fourth Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

Thank you Madam Chairperson for giving me the floor. I am here representing the Owe Aku Tiospaye of the Oglala Lakota Oyate and my name is Alex White Plume. This is the first time I have ever taken the floor at the United Nations so it is good to be here with so many allies and brothers and sisters supporting my words.

For many years I have known of our nation's work at the United Nations and I honor those who have been here before me: Milo Yellow Hair, Joe American Horse, Mel Lone Hill, Garfield Grass Rope and of course Tony Black Feather. Our elders sent us to the United Nations because we honor the values set forth in the Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. We believe that a time is coming when the ways of Indigenous peoples and the principles we stand for, that are consistent with the values of the United Nations, will be able to show the world a better way. It is a way in which the values of education and the elimination of poverty are not solely measured in material wealth but in the value of cultural, ecological and human diversity.

Teaching our non-Indigenous brothers and sisters in the United Nations about this way is also a part of our responsibility and our contribution to this process. For this reason, when we speak at the United Nations, it is important to say a little about who we are and not simply provide a list of recommendations.

In talking about Indigenous peoples, you must understand by now that land and the environment are indivisible from our way of life. Education and the elimination of poverty cannot happen without the land and resources of which we are a part. In trying to constantly take these things from us, we are poor because they have made us poor. We are therefore suspicious when outsiders talk about development and eradicating poverty.

Our sovereignty over our territory, which is about being a part of the entire fabric of the land, is the key to the elimination of poverty and the reestablishment of an educational way that preserves a good mind and a good spirit for everything.

In providing our peoples with education, we are also given a double edged sword. Education, in the way of the colonizer, has meant disruption and dislocation of our families. We are taught ways that are foreign to our spirit and that do not recognize our relationship with all things.

Regaining our pure spirit must include a process of decolonization of our minds to heal the historical grief and trauma that we have lived with for generations. In many of our communities it is this trauma that has hindered us more than poverty or any lack of education.

Therefore an attitude adjustment is also needed within UN agencies and bodies in order to understand that the Indigenous concept of poverty and education may be different from that of the Western world. Poverty is not merely the absence of money. We all need to be mindful of an Indigenous standard that sees poverty as the absence of culture, language, and the right to care for our land and environment in a respectful way, according to our original instructions.

On our own land, on the Western plains of North America, we have put together a means to support our community by growing industrial hemp. Industrial hemp is not a drug. It is an efficient and environmentally

sound way of ending the alarming destruction of the world's forests for many different uses. Yet, on my own land, my family faces the arbitrary and illegal destruction of our crop by the Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States. My younger brother and I are facing two life sentences for our attempts to provide an alternative to the destruction of the forests and give our community a means to support itself.

Without our cultures, and especially our languages, then we are truly poor. Responses to poverty and educational programs that are shaped without acknowledging the critical importance of land are of little use to us. But with our land and resources intact, our language flourishing, and our ceremonies taking place, in our view, we are wealthy.

The Owe Aku Tiospaye has had experience with all these issues and we have developed a response within our own extended family. From this experience, we humbly make the following recommendations to the Permanent Forum:

1. It has been said innumerable times. However, adopting the Declaration on the Rights of the World's Indigenous Peoples with respect for our sovereignty over lands and resources, as well as our cultures, is perhaps the single most critical step of our generation in preserving and enhancing the lifeways of Indigenous peoples. This Forum, UN agencies, the individual members and all of us here, must do everything in our power to have the original intent and spirit of that document enshrined as a Declaration of the United Nations. In the upcoming process at the Working Group, recently approved by the Commission, we think it would be helpful if an Indigenous person were selected to co-chair the meeting in order to continue the progress that is being made. This Forum could make that recommendation through ECOSOC.
2. Along with passage of the Declaration is the equally important revocation of the 15th Century Papal Bulls. These ancient documents which gave rise to the Law of Nations continue to oppress our peoples worldwide and permit the continuance of a prejudicial and unequal application of international law. We held a panel this week on this issue and are submitting, along with this intervention, a paper by our brother Steve Newcomb. We would urge the Forum to take steps to begin a process of revocation directly through the Vatican.
3. The discriminatory and prejudicial divisions between North and South with respect to Indigenous peoples must be ended. Divide and conquer is an old way and it is time to put a stop to it. Currently, because we are colonized by a wealthy country instead of by a "developing" nation, we do not have access to technical assistance and/or support from UN agencies. This unfair division does not consider the facts that Indigenous peoples all over the world, no matter where our territories are located, are faced with the same devastating statistics on health, education, hunger, etc., etc. The Forum should make the eradication of this type of discrimination its goals. Its mandate is to work with the UN agencies and changing this policy could be a lasting legacy of the current Forum members.
4. Through UNDP, UNEP and UNICEF, as well as other relevant agencies, priority should be given to funding programs by and for Indigenous peoples that deal with the effects of genocide and historical grief and trauma. Programs and processes that address culturally sensitive education and the eradication of poverty will be unsuccessful until the ravages of genocide and colonization are addressed. Our own people have learned effective ways of dealing with this issue in our communities and these programs should be supported by the United Nations as a part of the overall healing sought in the Millenium Goals.

Distinguished members of the Forum, representatives of nation states and NGOs, brothers and sisters: Thank you for listening to me. Pila maya yelo. Mitaku Oyasin.