

Intervention

The United Nations United Nations Permanent Forum

on Indigenous Issues

May 18, 2016

New York City

miSmin Tuuhis, kan-raakat Valentin Lopez, tumsan-ak kannis riccami makke nii naha

Dear distinguished members of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,

My name is Valentin Lopez and I am the Tribal Chairperson of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band which is comprised of the descendants of the indigenous peoples who were involuntarily confined at Missions San Juan Bautista and Santa Cruz in central California in the 17th and 18th centuries by Spanish missionaries and soldiers.

The theme for this United Nations Forum is "Indigenous peoples: conflict, peace and resolution. My remarks today will focus on resolution.

Like many indigenous peoples, our Nation suffers from the legacy of the fifteenth and sixteenth century Papal Bulls. The latter provided the ideological and political justification for Christian nations to conquer, enslave and dominate non-Christians around the world. The Bulls called all non-Christian peoples the enemies of Christ, declared that indigenous people were to be put into perpetual slavery, and urged that their property and possessions be confiscated by Christian nations.

In California, the Bulls were the foundation of the mission system, the policies of which decimated our ancestors physically destroyed our culture and environment, robbed us of our land and dignity, and denigrated our spirituality. The ramifications of these policies continued long after the missions were secularized.

Psychiatrists and psychologists have a name for these long-term effects – historical trauma – that often manifests itself in suicide, addiction, violence and poverty among the descendants of those who suffered historically. Historical trauma continues from generation to generation when the brutality of the historic acts is not acknowledged or repudiated, causing each generation to be victimized anew. Historical trauma means that there has never been any "resolution" to the original conflict.

For the past four and one-half years, our Nation has held bi-monthly wellness meetings with a tribal psychiatrist, Dr. Donna Schindler, and two therapists to help our members heal from our historical trauma.

We have learned that for wellness to occur, the truth of our history must be told and those who participated in the conquest and domination of our people must acknowledge and repudiate their own role in the destructive policies. Until the Catholic Church and other perpetrators do so, they will never forge a healthy relationship with indigenous peoples. Yet to date, the Church has only offered insincere platitudes, while the other perpetrators have remained silent.

For example, in 2015, Pope Francis issued a general apology to the indigenous peoples of the Americas while he was visiting Bolivia however his apology did not state for what he was apologizing. In Africa, the Pope called for "reconciliation," but did not define the term or explain what the Catholic Church was offering to make meaningful reconciliation possible. Last September, the Pope canonized Junípero Serra, the architect of the heinous mission system in California that was responsible for the death of more than 150,000 Indians. The canonization of Serra set back our healing for perhaps 100 years or more.

These actions are astounding to our Nation. It appears that for the Catholic Church, "reconciliation" requires that indigenous peoples accept the means and the outcome by which they were stripped of their humanity by the Papal Bulls. This is unacceptable. I urge all Nations to call for the Catholic Church to repudiate and rescind the fifteenth and sixteenth century Papal Bulls that gave rise to the so-called "Doctrine of Discovery."

suruuruy yuu tumsan-ak kannis,

Ho!