



WINNEMEM WINTU TRIBE

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Submission from the Winnemem Wintu Tribe on UNFP11-10 Agenda Item 7: Half Day on Water

Presented by Caleen Sisk-Franco, Chief and Spiritual Leader

Hestum chaleetun. Ne-to yet Kaa-aktus. Nees Ttheet. Teen teen iyeebaada lenda-mis eelawee Winnemem Wintu. Sawal miiyo mes baales bom, pee ha-t bohaa Wintun Tot.

Good afternoon Madame Chairperson, Members of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and esteemed colleagues. My name is Caleen Sisk-Franco and I am the hereditary traditional Chief and Spiritual Leader of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe.

Sawal mem. Sawal suuhana. Water is sacred. Water is life. Water is a great spiritual being. We are a water people. We come from a sacred spring and are the keepers of the water in our River and of all of the things that rely on that watershed out to the ocean. We understand that all things are connected. Nothing survives without water.

We understand and articulate our human rights to include the right to protect traditional cultural properties for our future generations. The water in our river, the water in our sacred spring, and the water we need to supply our homes are basic to our human rights and we must pass these down to our children and grandchildren. The water in our spring and river is part of our ceremonial practices. It provides the environment for our sacred salmon that holds our world together.

Providing access to water is not sufficient however. Water, the veins of Mother Earth, connected to everything, has needs too. Water needs our songs and ceremonies. It needs to flow freely. It needs our salmon swimming in it to clean it and to distribute nutrients to the rivers and streams and back to the ocean.

For us, salmon are inseparable from water. Both are necessary elements of our survival. We believe that when the last salmon is gone the people will be gone too. We know that salmon are the ultimate climate changers. Without salmon swimming in our waters the climate will continue to change in ways that will be devastating to mother earth. We need our traditional homelands and our homelands, including our water, need us to do the job we were put here to do.

"If the Sacred Fires are not lit, how will our children learn?"
Honor Your Traditional Lifeways

We, like many indigenous peoples around the world, are being denied our human rights to access without interruption, sing to, use, and protect our water. The denial of our tribal existence by the US government leaves us without the basic protections we deserve. For us to achieve our indigenous rights and responsibilities to our water the US must reverse its discriminatory practices that have created two classes of American Indians.

We call on the Permanent Forum to:

- Again transmit your recommendation from the 3rd session, Item 82, “that Governments conduct studies on how the diversion of rivers and creation of dams, mining and mineral extraction, energy development, the mining of groundwater and the use of aquifers for industrial and commercial purposes will affect the lives of indigenous communities prior to conducting any of these actions in order to ensure that indigenous peoples are not confronted with such problems as increasing scarcity of freshwater, the toxic contamination of indigenous peoples’ territories and the lack of access of indigenous communities and other life forms to water, including oceans.” Further, the Permanent Forum should clarify that such studies should be conducted prior to modification of any existing projects.
- Again transmit your recommendation from the 4th Session, item 29, that, “immediate steps be taken within the framework of the Commission on Sustainable Development to protect water from privatization and from bilateral and multilateral governmental agreements and other incursions that affect the integrity of waters and impoverish communities, particularly indigenous women.”
- To urge Member States to implement the findings of the Special Rapporteur on Human Right to Water and Sanitation.
- Call for a study to educate people about the number of contaminated streams, springs, rivers, groundwater, dams, and reservoirs, etc. with recommendations to return waters to natural, clean status.
- Urge the US to fully implement the Declaration for all American Indians to assure their ability to exercise their indigenous rights to water.

Hee Chala Beskin!