



**UNITED NATIONS**  
**PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES**  
Ninth Session - New York, 19 to 30 April 2010 – Item 5

Thank you Mr. Chairperson,

On behalf of Ola Cassadore, President of the Apache Survival Coalition, we appeal in defense of Mount Graham, the maximum sacred land of the Apache, desecrated and jeopardized by the construction of an international astronomical observatory of immense controversy, built by various sponsors such as the University of Arizona, the Vatican and the Italian government.

Despite over 20 years of Apache protests, numerous appeals and the vast support of both indigenous and non-indigenous organizations world-wide, Mount Graham continues to be desecrated and put at risk, while the Apache continue to be deprived of their sacred land.

All of the Western Apache tribes have united together in this protest. In the last few years they have met many times with the Forest Service to obtain the enlistment of the mountain in the National Register of Historic Places, given its fundamental religious and natural importance. However, Mount Graham has never been included in the Register, despite the fact that it meets all necessary requirements. The Apache sacred mountain continues to undergo desecration and the Apache continue to be excluded from their maximum spiritual land.

Mount Graham plays a basic role in the traditional knowledge of this People and has always been a sacred place for them, as a spiritual and therapeutical reference point. This is the mountain where the Apaches find herbs, waters and plants for their medical cures. This mountain is a place for collective rites and individual prayers, basic for their culture and religion. According to Apache tradition, Mount Graham is home to Ga'an, spiritual messenger and keeper of their traditional knowledge.

The ex-Vatican Observatory director, the jesuit Father Joseph Coyne, declared that the Apaches' perspective to defend the mountain "is a kind of religiosity that must be suppressed with all the force".

In the last 20 years Mount Graham has been subjected to serious damage and deforestation for the construction of the observatory.

These are the words of Ola Cassadore: "My Grandmother was spiritually strong in her Apache way and she would give me lessons in the darkness of the nights on the mountain. She told me not to be afraid, that we were here in our place on the mountain, we were part of this land and all things on this mountain, and we were protected. Many years later the Apache Elders told me of the project for building the astronomical observatory on Mount Graham. It was painful for the Elders and tears streamed from their eyes as they talked to me that Mount Graham is a sacred mountain they didn't want to see destroyed. That was when I decided to oppose the project. A long road still remains to be done for us, but we shall keep on fighting".

Over 20 years of struggle to defend Mount Graham must not be wasted. 20 years of frustrations, during which Ola and her people have travelled for thousands of miles, prayed and shed tears for their spiritual mountain. They have never given up. Ola has continued to inform the non-Indians that this mountain is, in her words, "a Dynamic Manifestation of Spiritual Power that has never been conquered or destroyed".

We believe the identity of Indigenous Peoples is based on their traditional knowledge.

The violation of an Indigenous Peoples' Sacred Site means the survival of their identity is at risk.

Therefore, we wish to make the following recommendations to the Permanent Forum:

- 1) Strongly urge the United States, in conjunction with the interagency of the National Park Service, to include Mount Graham in the National Register of Historic Places;
- 2) Strongly solicit UNESCO to include Mount Graham in the World Heritage Register;
- 3) Strongly recommend the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) to safeguard Mount Graham as cultural heritage;
- 4) Strongly urge the remaining States which constitute a presence on Mount Graham through their telescopes, to withdraw from Mount Graham, as this represents a severe violation of Articles 3 and 32 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; thereby restating full access and the sacred use of the mountain to the Apache people.
- 5) Strongly urge this Forum to undertake, in conjunction with the Human Rights Council Mechanism, an effort to ensure that the Apache have full sovereignty of Mount Graham, their sacred land, and the elements it contains, such as the therapeutic waters and herbs, as specified in Article 32 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We call on this Forum to help protect the religious rights of the Apache People through the defence of their Sacred Mountain.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson.

**Rosalba Nattero**

*Representative:*

*Apache Survival Coalition, Arizona*

*Wiran Aboriginal Corporation, Australia*

*Menhirs Libres, Brittany*

*Bassa Peoples, Cameroon*

*Ensemble Allons dans la Paix, Benin*