

# Tetuwán Oyate



## MEMBER RESERVATIONS

Pine Ridge  
Lower Brule  
Cheyenne River  
Standing Rock  
Rosebud  
Fort Peck  
Crow Creek  
Santee  
Canadian Sioux

Economic and Social Council  
Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues First Session  
New York, May 13-24, 2002, The United Nations

Intervention by Charmaine White Face  
Item 6 – Environment

Thank you Mr. Chairperson. My name is Charmaine White Face. I am Oglala Lakota from the Tetuwán Oyate with the Teton Sioux Nation Treaty Council. For the Indigenous peoples, I am also a mother and a grandmother. For the member states, I was a teacher at the college level of environmental science and I am now a writer. I want to thank you for your giving me this opportunity to speak.

The colonization process has tried to take away our identity as Indigenous peoples whether we are Lakota, Filipino or from Africa. Our identity cannot be changed by man-made laws. Can a man-made law make a tropical palm tree grow in the snowy regions of a mountain? No. A man-made law that changes or tries to change an Indigenous person into a form of the colonizer destroys the Indigenous identity of that person. This is a form of genocide.

Today, the global environment is being rapidly destroyed. Yet for tens of thousands of years, our peoples were able to live and flourish physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally without destroying this very same global environment. We all know that industrialization and technology has caused this global environmental sickness. Yet the very people who could teach the colonizers how to truly live with the Earth, not in domination of the Earth, are being constantly pushed to change their identity and become like the colonizer.

Treaties were made for specific land areas between colonizers and Indigenous people for the purpose of continuing the lifeways of human beings with that specific environment. The upholding of those treaties today could still restore those lifeways and heal those specific environments. For example, for many of us Lakota people this would mean a restoration of Natural Law which would give new life to our beautiful plains, the center of Turtle Island, and the buffalo upon which we have always depended for the health of our peoples. We are the Pte Oyate, the Buffalo Nation. In order to thrive, we must be able to live with our older brother, the buffalo.

It is imperative that the member states of the UN broaden their perspectives now to see that the lifeways of Indigenous peoples are the only cure for the environmental sickness all over the world. The member states of the UN need, desperately need the wisdom of Indigenous peoples. We are the elders of the human family. The "natural resources" that the industrialized governments depend on will soon be depleted. How will they live then? This need by the member states of the UN to heal the environmental sickness of the world is further evidence of the need for a permanent budget and secretariat for the Permanent Forum. Additionally, it is important that the Permanent Forum, in preparing its Final Report, consult with a duly authorized committee of Rapporteurs selected by the Indigenous Caucus. Only with these resources can we adequately share this wisdom and fulfill what the Honorable High Commissioner for Human Rights requested on Monday; "that we give at least equal weight to what indigenous peoples can do for the United Nations." I say these words for all my relations, Mitaku Oyasín. Píla maya. Thank you.