

**Joint Statement of the National Congress of American Indians
and the Native American Rights Fund**

**United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
Tenth Session, July 10-14, 2017,
Geneva, Switzerland**

**Agenda Item 6: Ten years of implementation of the United Nations
Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: good practices and lessons
learned**

[Intro]. In September 2017, we will celebrate the Tenth Anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The UN Declaration holds tremendous promise for Indigenous Peoples as a recognition of the “minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world.” The UN Declaration has the potential to make a profound difference in the lives of Indigenous Peoples, and enhance their ability to protect their lands and citizens. It continues to serve as a guidepost for Indigenous Peoples as we assert and advocate for our rights in domestic fora, as well as before international bodies such as the United Nations.

Just over a year ago, Indigenous Peoples in the Western Hemisphere were able to achieve the adoption by the Organization of American States of an American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The General Assembly of the OAS, this past June, adopted a plan of action to implement the American Declaration. We now hope to see follow-up by member states in the Western Hemisphere supporting implementation of both of the Declarations in the near future. We have seen ten years go by since the UN Declaration, and we hope the next ten years will include more robust implementation of these important Declarations.

Indigenous nations in the United States embraced the UN Declaration upon its ratification by the United Nations General Assembly, and were pleased to see the US Government finally adopt a supportive position in 2010, albeit with an explanation of that support that many believe falls short in key areas.

A number of Indigenous nations within the United States have adopted the terms of the UN Declaration into their domestic laws and codes. Several have translated the UN Declaration into their own indigenous languages, describing and contextualizing the concepts embodied by the articles of the UN Declaration. They have also made known their expectations from the governments of the nations in which they reside, and from the UN and OAS systems.

However, there is much work to be done to achieve the ends of the UN Declaration. In the UN system itself, we have encountered resistance to the right of indigenous governments to achieve an appropriate and dignified status through which to participate in the UN system, contrary to Articles 2, 3, 18, 19, 38, 41, and 42, among others. We call on the UN Member states to continue to work towards implementation of the UN Declaration. In doing so, member states must include Indigenous Peoples at every step, and this includes the full, meaningful, and

effective participation of Indigenous Peoples in decision making on issues affecting them, within the UN system, as well as domestically at the country level.