



Title: Healing and Bears Ears National Monument - April 17, 2018

Statement to the United Nations by Angelo Baca, Cultural Resources Coordinator, Utah Diné Bikéyah

Dear Madame Chair:

My name is Angelo Baca from the Navajo and Hopi nations, which are tribal nations located within our aboriginal territory in the southwest region of the United States. I serve as Cultural Resources Coordinator for Utah Diné Bikéyah, a non-profit with an all Indigenous Board and a mission to engage at the local level Native community members to protect our traditional cultures and sacred lands.

Today, the Bears Ears National Monument is at the center of a critical discussion around Indigenous rights and protection of sacred sites and traditional uses in the United States. Five federally recognized tribal nations (Navajo, Hopi, Zuni, Ute Mountain Ute, Uintah and Ouray Ute) worked for years to protect the shared ancestral lands we depend upon for our cultural and spiritual survival. Former President Obama heard our call for legal protection, and using his authority under the Antiquities Act, he designated the Bears Ears National Monument in southeastern Utah. With no consultation with the five tribal nations, and contrary to law, the Trump administration recently revoked the Obama Bears Ears proclamation and removed protections across more than 445,000 hectares (or 1.1 million acres) of our ancestral lands, containing more than 100,000 historic archaeological and sacred sites significant to more than a dozen Tribes in the southwestern United States. We have had to resort to the courts in search of justice.

Indigenous communities all over the world, including in the United States, are seeking to protect our cultural landscapes. Bears Ears National Monument was reduced in violation of our human rights. If this action stands, it sends a signal that any protection of land sacred to indigenous peoples may also be at risk.

On January 30, 2018, UN Special Rapporteur Tauli-Corpuz issued a statement about Bears Ears saying, "The decision to reduce the area included in the national monument by 85 percent is a huge setback for the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples. It exposes thousands of acres of sacred lands and archaeological sites to the threats of desecration, contamination and permanent destruction." Article 11 of UNDRIP, asserts that "Indigenous peoples have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, ...etc." This well-established principle was realized by local Indigenous people and their parent Tribes who requested the Bears Ears National Monument status to preserve this sacred living cultural landscape.

Today, the United States government is dishonoring the position of the five Tribes. Less than one year after designation, President Trump removed protections and re-opened the region to mineral leasing and other harmful uses that will destroy this sacred, living landscape. Natural resource extraction industries, such as uranium mining, have negatively impacted our Indigenous community health and lives. The Tribes have sought protection of this sacred place through a monument designation to provide for healing for indigenous people, the land, and all our human and non-human relatives.

In light of the current, serious threat to Bears Ears, we ask for your leadership and support and that representatives from across the globe to stand in solidarity with the five Tribes of the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition and our allies to promote our vision of healing. We recommend that the United States government honor and respect Tribes by restoring the original Bears Ears National Monument designation and the original co-management structure which invites the sharing of our Indigenous traditional knowledge and stewardship practices on these lands. We recommend the international community send letters of support asking that Tribes be treated as equals through respectful government to government engagement by the United States.

We invite the U.N. Special Rapporteur, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz to attend the Bears Ears Summer Gathering on July 20-22nd, 2018 to celebrate Indigenous cultures from Bears Ears. We seek help from all nations in building strong alliances and partnerships with the international community, tribal leaders, elders, traditional knowledge holders and native non-profit organizations to help Utah Diné Bikéyah and Indigenous communities restore land protections and promote healing for all.