

~~THE~~ The Apache Survival Coalition

Agenda Item V

11th Session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations,
Commission on Human Rights, Economic and Social Council.
United Nations. Geneva, Switzerland.

~~Madame Chair,~~

Thank you

My name is Ola Cassadore-Davis. / ~~I am Chairperson for the~~
Apache Survival Coalition. Thank You for the opportunity to
speak on behalf of the San Carlos Apache Tribe in Arizona,
U.S.A. (I have worked many years to ensure the survival of
Apache culture, tradition, and spiritual heritage) Presently
the San Carlos Apache Traditional people are battling for
their cultural survival. Their most sacred mountain, Mount
Graham, is being desecrated by the construction of three
telescope projects on the sacred peaks of our holy mountain.
The projects are sponsored by the University of Arizona in
Tucson, Arizona; the Vatican Observatory, Rome, Italy; the
Arcetri Observatory of Florence Italy; and the Max Planck
Institute of Germany.

The sacred peaks on Mt. Graham are part of ^{their} ~~our~~ existence.
Mount Graham is a foundation of Apache Culture, past, present,
and future. The mountain has many meanings to ^{the} ~~my~~ people
because of its role in ^{our} ~~our~~ cultural traditions as well as
things are there, ^{and} ~~we~~ learnt from our sacred land. It gives ~~us~~
information about ~~our~~ life. Our sacred peaks are like altars,
libraries. There is sacred knowledge embedded in the
landscape.

Our teachings are passed through oral tradition. We
depend on our land as an essential part of learning. All
things on the mountains represent our values. We do not make
the same separation between nature and people that is found in
traditional western thinking. The San Carlos Apache Tribal
Council has passed 3 resolutions opposing the telescope
project. These resolutions were passed in unity with
traditional Apache spiritual leaders, and with the support of
nearly every national Indian organization and many human
rights groups throughout the world.

La San Carlos Apache

Nonetheless, ~~we~~ have not been able to stop the telescope project that desecrates ~~our~~ ^{the} sacred mountain. The University of Arizona, and the Vatican, as well as German and Italian astronomers have ignored every plea of the Apache people.

Mount Graham was part of the lands, ~~we~~ reserved before 1873, when the United States government took this part of our land. Now the United States Forest Service manages the land that includes Mt. Graham. The U.S. Forest Service gave the University of Arizona the permit to build the telescope on Mt. Graham, even though the University of Arizona and the Forest Service knew that Mt. Graham was sacred to the Apaches. The San Carlos Apache oral history is rich with references to its religious significance. Grenville Goodwin, an eminent anthropologist, lived on the San Carlos Apache Reservation almost ten years and using accepted western scholarly techniques he extensively documented the sacredness of Mount Graham. The documents were on record in the University's own archives at its central campus. The Apache Survival Coalition is now in court with their back against the wall pleading to stop the project, which the University of Arizona lawyers claim has been exempted by the U.S. Congress from all U.S. cultural protection, and environmental laws. This exemption originated with a special legislative provision advocated by the University of Arizona that was approved during the final hours of the 1988 Congress.

The Vatican, two Jesuit priests, the director of the Vatican Observatory and the University of Arizona ethnohistorian have submitted affidavits in the lawsuit against the Apaches, contending that the Apache sacred mountain is not really sacred to the Apaches. The Vatican astronomers are now saying that they are building their telescope to search for extra-terrestrial life and would consider baptizing these extra-terrestrial.

Finally, contrary to the position of the University and its paid experts, ^{the} the telescope project will in fact interfere with ~~our~~ religious ceremonies and Apache Way of traditional practices.

The Mt. Graham situation highlights a long string of

injustices against Native American sacred sites nationwide. The United States government policies have allowed this destruction of Native American culture, which is a form of discrimination against indigenous people. Native American have no effective legal protection or remedy, they cannot worship in their chosen ways. Along with broken treaties and 500 years of repression, the government laws protect other religions but do not protect Native American religion. Most of what we had and what we were has been destroyed. We are asking help for protection for those few places that remain.

Thank You Madame Chair.

Gla Casadone Davis