

**Statement of the Delegation of the United States of America
Fourth session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

Agenda Item 5:

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
July 11-15, 2011: Geneva, Switzerland

Thank you, Mr. Chairman: It is with great satisfaction that the United States is able to address this issue during this session of the EMRIP, approximately six months after President Obama announced, at the second White House Tribal Nations Conference, the United States' support for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. As President Obama stated at that time: "The aspirations [that the Declaration] affirms -- including the respect for the institutions and rich cultures of Native peoples -- are one[s] we must always seek to fulfill."

President Obama has invited tribal leaders to Washington to meet with him and many of his Cabinet officials at two White House Tribal Nations Conferences, in 2009 and 2010. Those sessions have given tribal leaders unique opportunities to discuss their priorities with the President and his most senior officials.

While the decision to support the UN Declaration was a very important one for the United States, it is not an end in itself. That is because --to quote the President, "What matters far more than words -- what matters far more than any resolution or declaration -- are actions to match those words."

Mr. Chairman: U.S. government agencies are engaged in many initiatives that will ensure that U.S. support for the UN Declaration is meaningful and contributes to the improvement of the lives of Native Americans.

Perhaps most fundamentally, the United States continues to work with tribal leaders to identify the matters that they believe are priorities for U.S. government action and to formulate appropriate responses.

In addition, as [I] described [yesterday], the Obama Administration has reinvigorated implementation of the U.S. Executive Order on "Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments" to ensure that the voices of tribal officials are heard in making policies that have tribal implications.

Other actions of U.S. agencies that complement U.S. support for the Declaration and contribute to the improvement of the lives of Native Americans include:

- taking 105,000 acres of land into trust in the past two years as part of the U.S. effort to restore tribal homelands;
- accelerating the rebuilding of schools on tribal lands and improving programs at tribal colleges;
- improving public safety on tribal lands, including by giving tribes greater authority to prosecute crimes;
- updating infrastructure on tribal lands;
- modernizing health care services available to Native Americans who use the Indian Health Service; and
- combating childhood obesity in Native American youth. This latter effort is an initiative of our First Lady, Michelle Obama, who is enlisting Native American athletes to encourage Indian children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

These efforts are just a few of the many U.S. government initiatives that complement U.S. support for the UN Declaration. I invite you to read the announcement document that was released to accompany President Obama's remarks for information on additional initiatives as well as a further explanation of the U.S. position on the Declaration.

[Madam Chair,] thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this important topic.