



INTERNATIONAL INDIAN TREATY COUNCIL (IITC)

2390 Mission Street, Suite 301
San Francisco, CA 94110
Tel (415) 641-4482/Fax (415) 641-1298
iitc@igc.org
www.treatycouncil.org



doCip
ARCHIVES

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

First Session, United Nations Headquarters, New York City, May 13 to 24, 2002

Agenda Item #6: Review of UN System: HEALTH

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for allowing us to take the floor on an issue that is integral to the Indigenous Peoples of the world. My name is Ron Lameman and I am making this intervention on behalf of the International Indian Treaty Council and one of its affiliates, the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations from Treaty Six Territory in western Canada. I bring greetings from the Cree, Dene, Nakoda and Saulteaux Nations in western Canada who have delegated me to this historic inaugural meeting of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The observations that I will make are specific to the territory that I come from, but I am sure that they reflect situations that are the same in all parts of the world where Indigenous Peoples are clinging to the last vestiges of their lands.

The indiscriminate and unbridled destruction of the environment in our Treaty Six Territory is of great concern to the Indigenous Nations and Peoples who are the original inhabitants of the Treaty Six Territory. The various multinational and transnational corporations that have been damming our rivers and exploiting our forest, oil and natural gas resources have been doing so without the consent and meaningful consultation of the grassroots Indigenous Peoples who are the most adversely affected.

These development activities not only destroy the natural environment, they also threaten Indigenous Peoples' health and their ability to sustain themselves through hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering. **These development activities are also a direct violation to Treaty Six of 1876.** Within Treaty Six of 1876, guarantees were made to our ancestors that the agreement to share and co-exist with the settlers would not adversely affect their ways of life. According to our Elders, throughout the Treaty discussions our ancestors were told in many instances that they could continue to live, "As you were before, this Treaty is on top of what you already have"!! Our ancestors were also told that their ability to harvest the wildlife would remain unfettered as before. The Queen's representatives assured our grandfathers that the settlers would bring their own animals to provide their own food.

Mr. Chairman, let us enlighten the Permanent Forum on the drastic environmental changes happening today at home. The clear-cutting of our forests is devastating our wildlife, which we depend upon to supplement our diets in order to maintain the good health historically enjoyed by our peoples.

Within the boreal forests that border our Treaty Territory to the north, the flora and fauna are so sensitive and unique that once the heavy machinery to harvest the trees are brought in, the destruction that is done is in most cases irreparable. It does not matter how many trees you replant, many of the life sustaining and unique medicinal plants and roots that are eaten by the wildlife are destroyed. This results in the forced movement of the wildlife to areas that are not only foreign to them but also have a less than healthy or highly contaminated food supply, thus causing a chain reaction in the food chain. Oil patch activity, inorganic farming with chemical herbicides and pesticides, and contamination of the groundwater, rivers and lakes by timber harvesting **compounds** the inability of the wildlife to remain healthy.

The driving force behind all of this activity is the almighty dollar, the majority of which ends up in the hands of those that need it the least. The multi-national and trans-national corporations reap most of the benefits and do not have to suffer the consequences of their environmental degradation. The ones who suffer the most are the Indigenous Peoples because their traditional way of life is so adversely affected through the destruction of many medicinal plants and roots that grow only in those sensitive areas. Their traditional diet is also threatened, thus forcing them to adopt a largely non-traditional diet. This non-traditional diet is making them sick in epidemic proportions, with the increase in cases of diabetes, cancer and heart disease leading to numerous other health-related problems.

The governments are not innocent bystanders in this genocide that is occurring with regard to the Indigenous Peoples. They are just as guilty by repeatedly allowing the exploitation of these resources because of the tax dollars and the so-called stimulation of the economies that resource extraction brings to the affected areas. Their silence and inaction is complicity in the increase in health related problems that can be directly linked to the impacts of the aforementioned activities.

The governments have put themselves in a "catch-22" situation with regard to the health of Indigenous Peoples. They are complicit in the destruction of the way of life that has kept Indigenous Peoples healthy for untold millennia. At the same time their expenditures in the area of health care are skyrocketing because of the diseases caused by the unhealthy diet that Indigenous Peoples have been forced to adopt. So not only have they broken the Treaty promises with regard to hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering and the way of life that they guaranteed would not be disturbed. They are now, even as we speak, looking for ways to get out of their Treaty promise to **full and comprehensive health care as guaranteed by the "Medicine Chest" clause in Treaty Six of 1876.**

Mr. Chairman, we hope that one of the areas of work that can be undertaken by the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is a review the policies within the UN system that are inherently flawed with regard to Indigenous Peoples in so-called "developed countries." We have brought to your attention the violation of Treaties, the violation of basic human rights and the genocide of Indigenous Peoples. However, because of the way the UN system is presently set up, you will either have to take our word for it or you can believe the Government of Canada when it attempts to gloss the situation over. We are recommending a fundamental change whereby the **appropriate agencies would be**

mandated to investigate situations of Indigenous Peoples in developed countries. This could be done by the appointment of Special Rapporteurs and through official hands-on, integrated investigations by the WHO (World Health Organization) and other UN agencies.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, although the International Indian Treaty Council and the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations are encouraged by the formation of this much overdue Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, we are also cognizant of the fact that we are fast running out of time. Even as we speak many thousands of our people are dying and the habitats of our wildlife are disappearing under the onslaught of the multinational and transnational corporations. The time for talking is drawing to a close. The time for action is at hand for the benefit of our relations that are stricken by diseases, for the benefit of our Sacred Mother Earth and for the benefit of our future generations.