

**EMRIP July 2014 Session**

**U.S. Statement: Study on the Promotion and Protection of the  
Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Natural Disaster Risk Reduction and  
Prevention and Preparedness Initiatives**

**Wednesday, July 9, 2014**

Thank you. Within the United States, there are 566 Federally-recognized tribes. The United States Government recognizes the sovereignty of these indigenous people – “tribal governments” as we refer to them – who have a long and deep history in our country. While many indigenous peoples in the United States live what we might call a modern way of life, others still actively practice subsistence lifestyles. Nearly all continue to maintain a close, spiritual connection to the natural environment.

We agree with EMRIP’s study that, in order for disaster risk reduction strategies to be successful, it is crucial for government agencies to build strong relationships with indigenous peoples. We also agree that the participation of indigenous peoples in all stages of these strategies is crucial to ensuring that their rights are protected and respected. The United States has taken great strides to engage with tribes as partners in disaster management efforts by holding government-to-government consultations on new policies that may affect them, and engaging them in the development and implementation of disaster risk reduction. In this, we are informed by the Declaration, which, as the United States explained more fully in its statement of support, is non-binding but has both moral and political force. The United States consults with tribes when it develops disaster risk reduction programs and policies that may impact them. We actively

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seek the participation of indigenous peoples in these processes because we recognize the importance of their input.

As the study notes, education and awareness are key means of strengthening the participation of indigenous people in disaster risk reduction. The U.S. government recognizes this, and we strive to provide information to tribes about how they can prepare for disasters. We created an outreach campaign specifically for tribal governments – “Ready Indian Country” – to raise awareness and build emergency management capability so that they, their families, and their communities are better prepared for disasters.

We recently made a change in our legislation to recognize more fully the sovereignty of tribes in the United States. When a natural disaster occurs on tribal lands, a Federally-recognized tribal government may now request a Presidential Disaster Declaration directly from the President of the United States. The tribe is no longer required to go through state government to request the declaration, although this is still an option. We are proud of this step forward, and hope this will increase the ability of tribes to effectively respond to natural disasters and address the needs of their communities in a timely manner.

The U.S. government has also set aside hazard mitigation grant funding – specifically for tribal governments – to help them prepare for disasters and reduce their risk from hazards. Tribal governments can apply for this funding to enhance their limited resources, reduce their vulnerabilities, and enhance their resilience.

In closing, the United States applauds many of the points raised in this study and affirms our commitment to continue to actively engage with indigenous peoples in disaster risk reduction. Thank you for your attention.

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