

PF13 Nick 079

Salamanca High School Model UNPFII

Seneca Nation of Indians: Ohi:yo Territory

Presented by

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At

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Nya:weh Mr./Madame Chairman/Chairwoman. Dewhëniwas ni'gya:söh, my name is Nick Cooper. We are the Model Permanent Forum from the Ohi:yo territory of the Seneca Nation of Indians and this is our third year speaking at the Annual Conference. We are here to talk about indigenous youth, who we are, and what we feel is necessary for our future. Indigenous youth have been a topic of discussion since the founding of the forum and the First International Decade of Indigenous Peoples. We support the recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous Youth and we hope to further push the discussion to action. Today, our recommendations come from the reality of our experiences.

First, we are asking the Permanent Forum to create youth training programs that allow indigenous youth to interact with the UN systems.

We need to strengthen access to the Forum for indigenous youth. Our experience participating here has encouraged us to go further in our education. For instance, next fall I will be the first in my family to go to college. Another student, using her experience participating here, received substantial scholarships to an expensive university. Because of our experience being here physically, we feel understood. And, it is here with other indigenous peoples, that indigenous youth need to be trained.

Secondly, the Permanent Forum should support "prevention plans" for indigenous communities. Indigenous peoples need to heal. We need to heal from centuries of colonization both physically and spiritually. *Plans that use indigenous cultures and values as the foundation for development and education would begin or continue this healing.*

Third, there needs to be access to funding for these types to trainings and "prevention plans" for Indigenous youth and communities. *If the Permanent Forum could create scholarships, grants, or even a database of potential funders, we know more indigenous youth would be involved.* For example, this year one of our members participated in the Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous Youth. This only happened because of the financial support of UNICEF and the invitation of the Secretariat. Opportunities to participate change the lives of individuals and communities.

Half a century ago our territory was poor by non-native standards. Few of us had indoor plumbing or running water. If we were not in an Indian boarding school, our education came from our families, our territory, our

ceremonies and a one room school house with a native teacher. This was ögwë'owekha', the native way.

In 1964, the U.S. government forcibly relocated our communities to new planned communities. After a decade of anger and confusion we started selling tobacco products, then gasoline, and finally we opened a casino. Our tribe has grown wealthier and is now the second largest employer in Western, NY. We have access to health care, a brand new community center and tribal offices. This is all new to us. Unfortunately, with all of these things that money has brought us, our community is still sick.

Like most indigenous communities around the world all the indicators that reveal this sickness are higher than in comparable non-native communities. Higher drop out rates, higher drug and alcohol abuse, higher suicide rates, higher domestic violence rates, higher incarceration rates, and higher teen pregnancy rates. Every one of us youth standing before you has friends or family that fits into one or more of these categories and if we're being honest, maybe even ourselves. It is not our choice. It's just a part of our life. These negative life experiences and trauma are considered normal in our community. Many people ask, why with all this new wealth and development, do we still experience this sickness?

The simple answer is that indigenous people need empowerment. Not just economic empowerment, but empowerment to help us heal from effects of colonization in our history and the trauma of our daily lives. We need to develop an education that helps us process our new reality and helps us get stronger. A school with self-determination would allow us to do things the ögwë'owekha'. A way that we are in danger of losing. A way that we are working to recover. A way that recognizes the human being within the statistics of the modern world. It is the human being that is being lost. We are asking for an educational program to be established at the UN, through the Permanent Forum that would commit to teaching indigenous youth the inner mechanisms that will lead to empowerment.

Recently a Seneca elder, who taught in the now destroyed Red House Indian School, visited our group. She began by asking us, "Has anyone told you today that you are amazing?" The sad reality is that, in most indigenous communities the answer among the youth would be "no". We stand here as a group of youth who are screaming to all other indigenous youth that yes, we are amazing. We can see it, but please help us make others believe it to.