

PFIS Nathan #DSS

Salamanca High School UNPFII

Seneca Nation of Indians: Ohi:yo' Territory

Presented by

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At

UNPFII 14th Annual Conference

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Thank you _____ chairman/woman,

Nya:wëh Sgë:nö' gagwe:goh. We hope you are well. Thank you to all that are here for your work on indigenous rights. Your work here strengthens our communities back home. A special thank you to Tonya Frichner. Da:ne' ne:wa' Deyëthinö:nyöh Gadoišyohgwa' koh.

Today we have three recommendations. First, we recommend as part of the Post 2015 Development Goals, that there is a mechanism for indigenous peoples to access higher education. We must make sure to take into account the reality of indigenous peoples lives where overcoming historical trauma and discrimination makes getting into college a challenge in itself.

Second, there should be an educational curriculum that teaches everyone indigenous history, and teaches indigenous people their culture. National and state curriculums must include local knowledge as an integral part of the broader methods and curriculum.

Finally, to empower indigenous adolescents, we call on members of the Permanent Forum and other UN bodies to further expand access for meaningful participation. In addition, member states should facilitate access with support and funding at the local level.

Odosho:d ni'gya:soh. Onondowa'ga' ni'a:h. Agathayonih. My name is Nathan Abrams, Seneca tribe of the wolf clan. We are the Salamanca High School Model Permanent Forum. We represent the youth of the Seneca Nation of Indians on Ohi:yo territory in New York State. Today's topic is difficult for us to speak about because it is too personal and too painful. Standing here as indigenous teens between 14 and 18 years old, we know that we are at highest risk for suicide and self-harm.

All of us standing before you know the personal feelings that go with self-harm among youth: anger, depression, hopelessness, a lack of belonging and perhaps most importantly disempowerment. It seems obvious the answer to stopping suicide rates from growing is to give a sense of belonging . . . to empower indigenous peoples. For someone to commit suicide they must be spiritually broken. We have learned that this was in fact the goal of colonial governments around the world. After an attempt at physical genocide through wars and massacres, there was cultural and spiritual genocide through boarding schools and forced removal from our territories which held medicines and spiritual significance. Even on our territory which is wealthy compared to many Indigenous societies around the world, the typical Indigenous youth experiences far more traumatic events than the national average. Before we reach adulthood we see in our community and among our friends and family premature death, jail, substance abuse, and physical abuse that lead to those feelings of helplessness and depression that in turn lead to self-harm.

Perhaps the worst kind of abuse is neglect. Not recognizing the person in front of you as a human being. While this happens on a family level it also happens on a societal level. That is the abuse that every indigenous community in the world has felt. Is it any surprise that those places that have the highest indigenous suicide rate, the United States, Canada and Australia, were also the last to sign on to the UNDRIP. Places where dispossession of land, broken treaties, and racial discrimination have been so common that it has become a cliché? We, the children, carry the symptoms of those societal ills.

How does a child deal with the pain that indigenous adults carry with them? In the Seneca community they must, as a matter of survival, carry it too. The awareness of that pain comes with every contemporary fight. Every time we watch our parents and grandparents fight the dominant government about taxes, about education, about infringements on our sovereignty, and about unrecognized and broken treaties, we see a society that does not treat us as equals despite the words that come from the mouths of leaders. We have not been given sovereignty. We have had to stand strong against multiple and continuous abuses to keep what is left of our sovereignty. We know from a young age that the youth will have to fight the same battles that our elders are fighting now. If countries truly want to help their indigenous youth then they must listen to us. Do not tell us what is good for us. Ask us the indigenous peoples and youth who live with the burden of societal ills.

We support the work of the Center for Native American Youth in the U.S., and congratulate them for listening to and recognizing the issues that Indigenous youth have long known. We applaud the Permanent Forum's work done at the 2013 Youth Summit and the recommendations of the World Conference of Indigenous Peoples. These initiatives are absolutely necessary and must be continued if we are going to decolonize our minds. We must emphasize article 13 of the UNDRIP which allows us to revitalize our cultures. Finally, we also must assert and insist on the rights of community and security as stated in Articles 7 and 9.

Today's Indigenous youth are expected to walk in two worlds. In our Indigenous world we are responsible for the life of everything and everyone around us. The colonizing world in which we are made to live in, has forgotten this truth. We must still fight to attend our most important ceremonies without repercussion. Like with all Indigenous Peoples, these ceremonies develop identity and strength within us. They not only take care of the individual but also the community and the world. They make broken spirits whole again and empower our youth. It should be clear to all of us that the key to prevention is empowerment. Da:h oněh ēswe:hek ędwajē:nō:nih sga:d hędwa:yē' өгwanigoe' dędwadahnō:nyōh ha'deögwe'dageh. And so now, you will all realize it, we will do it carefully and with purpose, we honor each other the people.