



COOMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

SUB-COMMISSION ON PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION AND PROTECTION  
OF MINORITIES

WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENES POPULATIONS      AUGUST 3 - August 7, 1987

STATEMENT BY THE INTERNATIONAL INDIAN TREATY COUNCIL

a N.G.O. IN CONSULTATIVE STATES (CATAGORY II)

WGIP 87/NAM.USA/1

We are of the land and eventually we return to the land. Within the last 60 years our sacred burial grounds and holy lands have been desecrated. With the help of archeologists, our sacred lands have been eliminated and restricted for the benefit of the military , for the establishment of agribusiness, power and industrial plants. Sacred sites, historic sites and offering sites have been converted into, removed or submerged under building projects, highways, parking lots and so on, which leaves little land left where governments are able to product money 24 hours per day. The plants on the land were give to us to live, not to be taken away.

Inside the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., 18'000 North American Indian human remains are ready for display and are available for scientific research. An additional 2'000 heads of Indian people who were decapitated by the United States military are also stored therein. Throughout the United States as well as in european museums, universities and private collections, we estimate a million M.I.A.S (Missing Indian Ancestors) and held. This is a continuation of the violations of our treaty rights which guaranteed us the sactity of our sacred areas and religious freedoms. Archeologists, grave Robbers, and Entrepreneurs circumvent the laws by desacrating calling it academic freedom, scientific research and archeology. Indian burials are identified as "Archeological sites" while non-Indian burials are considered sacred Cemeteries. Academic freedom in this form should not supercede the Human Rights of our Indian Ancestors.

With the support of our elders, medicine people and our constituency, the International Indian Treaty Council sits on the steering committee of the World Archaeological Congress to guide and assist in the repatriation, reburial, protection of sacred sites, sacred tools of worship and to maintain Indian cultural hegemony and religious freedom as declared by the World Archaeological Congress in a resolution passed on the 6th of September of 1986.

One of the world's largest collection of the Northwest United States Indians are held in the Soviet Union. Frankfurt Germany is another location where collections from various expeditions are held. Many of the museums collections around the world are poorly documented which make the collections unidentifiable. We are lied to about the specimens found in excavations and must resort to the Freedom of Information Act such that litigation is necessary as a last resort to regain possession of our ancestors. We want our ancestors for our well being, our strength and our happiness.

Legislation to resolve disputes of this nature is less than a compromise. Such a compromise denies the release of great percentages of M.I.A.S. although the intent to return is acceptable. We ask the Working Group to consider the issue of desecration and return of all human remains and artifacts of Indigenous People to their proper living relatives or representatives in the development of standards for the protection of the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The sacred remains of our Ancestors and their grave goods as well as sacred objects should remain on sacred burial grounds when uncovered and if they have already been removed, must be returned to sacred burial grounds. The sale and barter of sacred remains and sacred objects must stop and all sacred burial, grounds should be respected and left undisturbed. The misuse of Indian religion around the world must stop as well as the use of Indians in archaeological excavations.

The damming and destruction of sacred rivers must stop. The laws on religions freedom must be rewritten to include and respect Indian people's religion, sacred lands, root gathering sites and ceremonial sites.

We repeat, the we want returned, what was taken from us in order to preserve the sacredness of our Mother Earth to benefit mankind to retain our health, languages, knowledge, culture, nourishment, medicine, comfort, harmony, spirituality and our lives. All these are connected and must be treated with respect and dignity. We're here to strengthen our lives to get good years, good food and peace. The attitude of disrespect that accompanies the desecration and destruction of our Ancestors final resting places is offensive immoral unethical and dangerous. We only want respect for what is ours, not a fight.