

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights  
Working Group on indigenous Peoples Twenty Third session 31July-04  
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**Statement of Bobby Castillo Leonard Peltier Defense Committee *item 4***  
***Review of developments pertaining to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples (b) Principle theme "Utilization of Indigenous Peoples' Lands by Non-Indigenous Authorities, Groups or Individuals for Military Purpose"***

Mr. Chairperson,

The last major campaigns by the U.S. Army against Indigenous People in North America took place in the late 1800s. But the military is still dangerous to Indigenous Peoples in the Western hemisphere today. A recent study contends the dramatic expansion of U.S. military bases during the 20th century was largely concentrated in the same remote, arid places where Indian reservations were located. That means Indigenous People's could be disproportionately exposed to toxic chemicals and unexploded bombs, compared to non-Indigenous People's , according to the report by Gregory Hooks of Washington State University. Two world wars and the Cold War "pushed the United States to produce, test and deploy weapons of unprecedented toxicity," the study said. "Native Americans have been left exposed to the dangers of this toxic legacy."

The Department of Defense has acknowledged the problems, quoting a 2001 department report that said Indian lands have "hazardous materials, unexploded ordnance (UXO), abandoned equipment, unsafe buildings, and debris." The government estimates that unexploded ordnance, which can include mines, nerve gases and explosive shells, probably contaminates 20 to 50 million acres of land in the United States and would take centuries to clean up at current rates.

By 1916, the U.S. Army owned about 1.5 million acres of land, and expanded dramatically during World War I. By 1940, the Army owned about 2 million acres of land. The huge buildup to World War II saw the Army acquire another 8 million acres. Most of those lands were in the vicinity or contiguous to Indian reservations. . Conventional weapons in World War II were far more lethal than weapons from previous wars, and the United States has led the world in the production of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

Today there are plans for a Pentagon-led experiment that involves detonating 700 tons of explosives at the Nevada Test Site on Western Shoshone traditional land which is part of an effort to design a weapon that can penetrate solid rock formations in which a country might store nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction.

The test will involve nearly 40 times the amount of commercial ammonium nitrate and fuel oil explosive set off in the largest open-air, non-nuclear blast at the site to date. In 2002 18 tons of explosives were set off at the Nevada Test Site. The Western Shoshone sovereign nation has always condemned the use of their traditional lands for bomb testing. They consider such practices as a violation of their treaty rights.

The Leonard Peltier Defense Committee condemns also all military test on Indigenous lands or elsewhere which are especially being designed to kill our brothers and sisters in Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon today. Indigenous people traditional values consider that all life is sacred so we cannot support State governments who are using military forces to bring death and destruction.

To conclude, we fully support Professor Alfonso Martinez words on its working paper on "Indigenous peoples and conflict resolution", stating " This is a major source of conflict, which often results in either the forced eviction of indigenous peoples, or life-threatening circumstances connected with nearby warfare. The State's power to 'extinguish' aboriginal titles to lands on the basis of national security needs is often used to give license to armed forces to launch national defense projects on indigenous lands including the construction of military bases, testing grounds and territory for war games."

No indigenous land should be used for military reason because this is against our values and traditions.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson,

Bobby Castillo

LPDC International spokesperson