

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities  
Working Group on Indigenous Populations, 17th Session, July 28 1999  
Agenda Item 5: Land

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*The Very Simple Reality of the "Land Question"*

An Oral Intervention by Dr. Taiaiake Alfred, Mohawks of Kahnawá:ke, Mohawk Nation.

*Skennenkowa Akwékon.*

Brothers and Sisters: I greet you all again in peace, and thank you for generously sharing your words and wisdom at this gathering. It is with a great swell of pride that I hear these sounds and call myself an Indigenous brother – your heartfelt words ring clear with the dignity our Indigenous peoples have preserved. Our dignity as people is the most precious thing we possess; but if we are to survive as nations and preserve the integrity of our lands and rights, we will need a spirit that does not yet live among us. Today, tomorrow and in the days to come, in thinking of you brothers and sisters, I will pray for our solidarity.

Madam Chair: Thank you for graciously allowing me a second opportunity to address the Working Group. I offer you, with great respect, a thought on the "special relationship" Indigenous peoples have with their land. In our view this issue is in fact very simple: Indigenous people own their lands.

Madam Chair: Our elusive specialness is rooted in a skewed perspective which sees Indigenous people as somehow "special." The situation only appears complex when it is strained through a colonial mentality – a view of the world based on false assumptions, faulty logical premises and fictive histories that lies at the core of settler societies. In the settler state's legal and institutional foundations, there is a racist logic that contradicts our generally held belief in human equality. By violently defending their own ideologies and by refusing to acknowledge our peoples' voices, states are buttressing the racist attitudes at the foundation of their societies. The prejudice that led previous generations of settlers to disregard the original people and claim ownership over vast territories was rooted in the belief Indigenous peoples were special only in that they were lesser people with lesser rights. The settlers are confused in the present belief that they can transcend the past without confronting its institutional legacy. I fear that the complexity of the Indigenous relationship to our lands is in the eye of the colonial beholder.

Madam Chair: I would encourage the Working Group on Indigenous Populations to consider the Indigenous land issue in the context of the United Nation's important work on racism and anti-discrimination, and to examine the ways in which state laws and policies are founded on outmoded and unacceptable notions of superiority that contradict the spirit of equality and the principal of universal human rights.

*Niawen'kowa.*

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**Madame Chairperson**

**This is a joint statement with the Metis Nation of Alberta Zone 3.**

**I am a student from the Maskwachees Cultural College.. In Treaty 6 territory, under our treaty water was never surrendered as part of the negotiations. I would like to provide an example of a land claim in progress on the Louis Bull Reserve. In the past our band had sold some land to farmers around our area. There is a lake in this area but the lake was not part of the sale. The farmers have been draining the lake and claiming the lake bed. We did not sell them this land and due compensation for this land area that is being drained is requested. Could you please look into this area as part of your study on land.**

**On behalf of Elizabeth Bell, Metis Nation of Alberta-Zone 3.**