



*National Indian Youth Council, Inc.*

318 Elm Street S.E.  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102  
505/247-2251

WGIP 87/NAM.USA/3

**Executive Director**  
GERALD WILKINSON  
Cherokee

**Associate Director**  
CHERYL J. MANN  
Cheyenne River Sioux

**Staff Attorney**  
S. JAMES ANAYA  
Tarasco Apache

**Attorneys of Counsel**  
JOHN PETOSKEY  
Ottawa/Chippewa  
JOHN J. KELLY  
THOMAS E. LUEBBEN

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**President**  
LAWRENCE ROBERTS  
Oneida

**Vice-President**  
DELMAR HAMILTON  
Caddo/Kiowa

RAMIRO REYNAGA  
Khasia

VIOLA HATCH  
Arapaho

JAMES NEZ  
Navajo

MIKE RIOS  
Papago

BERNARD SECOND  
Mescalero Apache

GERALD WILKINSON  
Cherokee

WALTER ECHO HAWK  
Pawnee

**ADVISORY COUNCIL**

ELISE BOULDING

WILLIAM SLOANE COFFIN, JR.

VINE DELORIA, JR.  
Standing Rock Sioux

RAYMOND ICKES

ALVIN JOSEPHY

DARCY McNICKLE  
Flathead (1904-1977)

AL ORTIZ  
San Juan Pueblo

PRESENTATION  
OF  
THE NATIONAL INDIAN YOUTH COUNCIL  
TO  
THE UNITED NATIONS  
INTERNATIONAL WORKING GROUP  
ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS  
GENEVA, SWITZERLAND  
AUGUST 3 - 7, 1987

"INDIAN HEALTH AND EDUCATION ISSUES  
IN THE UNITED STATES"

PRESENTATION  
of  
THE NATIONAL INDIAN YOUTH COUNCIL  
to  
THE UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL WORKING GROUP  
ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS  
GENEVA, SWITZERLAND  
AUGUST 3 - 7, 1987

Madam chairperson, distinguished committee persons. I thank you for the opportunity to bring you this report on Indian health and education matters in the United States.

My name is Gerald Wilkinson. I am Executive Director of the National Indian Youth Council. NIYC is an Indian rights organization founded in 1961. Today it has 46,000 members and is headquartered in Albuquerque, New Mexico. NIYC is accredited to the United Nations Economic and Social Council as a Non-governmental Organization.

Distinguished committee members, throughout its history the United States has signed hundreds of treaties with various Indian tribes. In these treaties, Indians under duress were forced to cede countless millions of acres of land. In return, the government agreed to respect their right to exist as a people on the land left to them and to provide certain services in the areas of health and education. All future governments of the United States have respected or disrespected these treaties in various degrees. But all, until the present, agreed that Indian health and education were government responsibilities under these treaties.

The present government of the United States has asserted that health and education lay outside of its obligation under the treaties and has initiated policies to rid itself of these obligations.

Indian people are deeply disturbed by these policies for three reasons:

1. We see that the United States, by breaking the treaties in this way, is flagrantly violating its own laws and its own moral obligations.

2. We believe that because we gave up one of the largest land masses on earth in exchange for services and therefore any services we receive from the government have already been paid for in advance.
3. We have seen over the tenure of this government, the impending collapse of Indian health and education systems resulting in a further lowering of the health and education levels of our people.

In the area of health, Indians are losing ground rapidly.

1. 60% of all reservation Indians live in absolute poverty.
2. Indians earn \$7,200 less than the average American.
3. Indians die from accidents 3½ times more than whites.
4. Indians are dying from alcoholism at 4 times the national average.
5. Indians die 2½ times more often before age 65 than the general population.
6. 37% of all Indian deaths occur before the age of 45 compared to 12% for the rest of the population.
7. Indians die from liver diseases at 10 times the U.S. rate.
8. American Indians experience the worst diet and the worst health of any group in the United States. All this, even though 60% of the world's diet is composed of foods domesticated and harvested by Indian People for thousands of years before others. And even though Indian People have given the world over 200 medicines vital to the health of everyone on earth.

This list could go on.

Indians are needlessly dying from easily preventible and curable ailments because the government is not exercising its responsibility under the treaties. Each year the budget for Indian health is cut 10% to 20% and the government has indicated it intends to get out of the Indian health business entirely. Many prominent health scholars predict that by 1992 there will be a 70% shortage of physicians treating Indians because the government is withdrawing incentives for physicians to go to remote rural areas to treat our people.

Moreover, Indian health professionals and doctors are not being raised up so that they might be able to help their own people.

We, the Indian People, believe that the provision of health care to Indians by the government is not something at their discretion but is something they are obliged to do under the treaties which they wrote and forced us to sign. If the government wishes to abrogate the treaties because it now finds their obligations under them too burdensome, it may do so and return the land to us.

In the area of education, Indians are steadily losing ground. While there are more Indians in school than ever before, this increase has not kept up with the explosion of the Indian population. So while there are now more Indians with schooling than ever before, there are also more Indians in poverty with no education than ever before. The statistics bear out this decline.

1. Of the Indians who enroll in high school, less than 50% will graduate.
2. 25% of the Indian population is between the ages of 14 and 25. 44% of the Indian population is under the age of 20.
3. Alcoholism deaths for Indians aged 15 to 26 is 8 times higher than the national average.
4. Indian youths are arrested and jailed 3 times more than non-Indian juveniles.
5. Over 25% of Indian families are headed by a single parent.
6. Among female-headed families, 2 out of 3 live below the poverty level.
7. More than 25% of all Indian children are placed in non-Indian foster homes, adoptive homes, and institutions.
8. While 8% of the Indian college-age young people will enroll in an institution of high learning, over 60% will not graduate. The majority of those who drop out do so in the first year of college.
9. Unemployment among Indians in rural areas average 80%.

These statistics could go on much more.

Distinguished committee members, it is the failure of the government to faithfully carry out its educational responsibilities under the treaties that has encouraged this educational disaster now going on among the Indian People. In addition, to abject neglect of its treaty obligations, the government has taken steps to get out of Indian education entirely. It has proposed to give up the 187 Indian schools it now operates. Those schools will be cut loose to fend for themselves. It has drastically reduced the funds to educate and train Indian teachers and administrators. It has greatly reduced the amount of scholarships for Indian students. It has limited the ability of Indian tribal governments and Indian parents to influence education policy. All these actions and many other actions have been taken without consulting the Indian People.

We Indian People contend that the government's violation of its agreements with us is not a question of national policy. We contend that it is a violation of international treaties entered into by two sovereign peoples.

Indian People, distinguished committee members, want to exercise their right of self-determination. They want to be able to stand on their own as a people. They want to control their own destinies. Health and education policies are essential to our struggle to survive as a people. When a government takes away our means to be in charge of these matters and takes this responsibility for itself, and then decides to rid itself of its responsibility without restoring to us the means of our doing it for ourselves; it is a violation of our human rights. Moreover, it has broken faith with us by breaking its treaties with us. These treaties are the framework for our relationship with the American People. They are the instrument for the protection of our rights. They are our hope for the future.

Broken treaties should be of great concern to this body. If solemn agreements can be discarded by a greater power to the disadvantage of a lesser one, then international cooperation will never be possible. International cooperation is based on trust. Trust is based on actions. Harmful actions should thus be condemned by the international community.

In the health and education policy actions of the United States government, there is more at stake than just our deepening misery.

We respectfully request the International Working Group on Indigenous Populations to carefully consider these matters in its deliberations.

The National Indian Youth Council appreciates your giving us the opportunity to bring these matters to your attention. Thank you.