

APACHE SURVIVAL COALITION

UNITED NATIONS WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

24" Session, Geneva 31 July to 4 August 2006

Thank you Mr. Chairperson.

I am the Representative of the Apache Survival Coalition and I am here to speak on behalf of its Chair, Ola Cassadore.

For many years now, the Apache Survival Coalition has been asking the Working Group on Indigenous Populations for help in defending Mount Graham, the Apache People's desecrated top sacred site, menaced by the construction of a challenged international astronomical observatory, so in this important Forum we intend appealing against the violation of a sacred site and the religious rights of the Apache People.

The Apaches have been protesting for 16 years, but despite the many appeals and the support of indigenous and non-indigenous organizations all over the world. Mount Graham continues being desecrated and menaced and the Apaches deprived of their rights to a sacred place.

We believe the identity of Native Peoples is based on their traditional knowledge, which preserves their points of reference for their history and spirituality and without which their invaluable inheritance is bound to disappear altogether, with dire consequences for all individuals.

Mount Graham, which the Apaches call *Dzill Nchaa Si'An*, plays a basic role in the traditional knowledge of this People and has always been a sacred place for them, as a spiritual and therapeutical reference point. This is the mountain where the Apaches find the herbs, waters and plants they need to practice their medical cures and has always been used by them for collective rites and individual prayers, basic for their culture and religion.

This sacred mountain is however menaced by the construction of an international astronomical observatory, a project shared by the Vatican and the Italian Government-financed Arcetri Observatory as well as the University of Arizona. Mount Graham was inside the Apache Reserve but the entire mountain area was abducted in 1873 by an executive order. It remained undisturbed until the University of Arizona started works on it to implement the observatory.

The project specified the construction of 7 telescopes, 2 of which have already been built and a third one due to be one of the world's most perfect was inaugurated in October 2004, but it is not completed yet. The Apaches appealed against this totally illegal development ever since they came to know of the project some 16 years ago and demonstrations opposing the project were organized even before one single tree was cut down or one mine exploded.

An international protest movement was born to support the Apache Survival Coalition led by Ola Cassadore, which united Indian Tribes and Non-Governmental Organizations worldwide, but the project never stopped. Its partners pursued it despite opposition and the Laws on the Preservation of Historical Sites by appealing to the exemptions Congress had granted in the past with the burial of other important laws.

In the last 16 years this Apaches' living and vital mountain element has been subjected to serious damage, deforestation and mines exploded for the observatory foundations. A great rift crossing it vertically was dug to install electrical power line and a great tower containing the Large Binocular Telescope microwave radiation equipment has just been completed. The Microwave Tower installation demanded prior consultation with local Tribes.

The Apache Survival Coalition founded the Western Apache group that unites all West Apache Tribes to support the San Carlos Apaches in protecting Mount Graham. They met with United Nations Special Rapporteur Rodolfo Stavenhagen in Arizona for the second time in last October to illustrate the reasons for their protest.

The Western Apaches have met the Forest Service quite often over these past years, to obtain addition of the mountain to the National Register of Western Apache Historic Places and Cultural Property due to its basic religious importance. The application was in line with the qualifications of the National Historic Preservation

Act.