

**UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 17th Session - Agenda Item #4,
Submitted by the Seventh Generation Fund for Indigenous Peoples
Statement: Culture and Environment for the Protection of Sacred Sites
April 19, 2018**

Thank you Madam Chair, esteemed members of the Permanent Forum, distinguished experts, and my Indigenous relatives. Saqšwalaw he' I Kuhk'u kakti Šmuwič, She loves the People, is my name in Chumash. I am also known as Deborah Sanchez, representing the Seventh Generation Fund for Indigenous Peoples.

This statement comes under Agenda Item #4 and the focus is on two of the six mandated areas, Environment and Culture. This statement relates to the urgent need for the preservation and protection of sacred sites.

A sacred site designation by Indigenous Peoples should be a paramount consideration over other competing interests of the nation states; interests such as economic interests, including extraction industries, which mine or abuse so-called "natural resources." These industries also abuse our sacred elements such as the air, Earth and water.

RECOMMENDATION: We call for the Permanent Forum coordinate with UNESCO, and other relevant UN Agencies to work directly with Indigenous Nations whose sacred places are targeted or being exploited in order to strengthen the protections through designations by Indigenous Peoples. This is of urgent importance at this time.

These extraction industries assault our Mother. This Indigenous viewpoint, almost universal among Indigenous Peoples, is the foundation of everything we believe, the foundation for our worldview, and our way of life. Yet, it is not given the deference it deserves because it is intangible.

It is not given the deference it deserves because it competes with money and profit. For us this viewpoint represents a sickness that was brought to this country and many others around the world. Some call it a virus; others call it a *weitiko* psychosis. Such a psychosis of the spirit that our own people are not immune to is a psychosis that perpetuates the abuse of peoples, animals, plants and our Mother to exhaustion.

Our worldview is critically important to our existence and survival. Sacred places are linked with that existence and survival for us to continue as distinct peoples. Protection of our sacred sites is one aspect that ensures our survival and well being.

Indigenous Peoples should also not be compelled to reveal our spiritual beliefs, indigenous knowledge, or oral histories and traditions to "prove" to nation states

the reasons we hold these are lands as sacred. Many times we are forced to reveal sensitive information in an administrative and legal proceedings or face the consequences.

Although the nation states guarantee a level of protection, remember we are talking about our colonizers and oppressors, whose laws are ever changing, inconsistent and designed to divest our people of our traditional homelands.

Indigenous Peoples in this region, south of the Medicine Line cannot count on consistency with changing Presidential administrations as was unfortunately displayed in the 85% reduction of protected land by the current administration at the Bears Ears, a sacred site vital to numerous Indigenous Nations.

We look to this international forum to help us decry these inconsistencies and lack of deference to designation of sacred sites by Indigenous Peoples, and to take action on this recommendation.

Thank you kindly for your attention.