

**Onondaga Nation
via Nedrow, New York
August 1990**

COMMUNIQUE NO. 13

Opening Statement

The Indigenous People of the Western Hemisphere meeting in Quito, Ecuador, in July 1990 declared this year to be the Year of the Condor and the Eagle. This signifies the coming together of North and South American Native Peoples in mind and spirit.

The year 1990 is also significant to our people because it is the one-hundredth anniversary of the massacre of Chief Big Foot's Minneconjou Band of Lakotas and the murdered Sitting Bull's Hunkpapa people at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, on December 29, 1890. An estimated 375 unarmed people, including men, women, and children, were buried in a mass grave. It is significant that the United States Army issued 24 medals of valor for that day's fatal work. The refusal to rescind these medals of valor illustrates the attitude of ongoing racism toward Indian people.

The annual council of the Traditional Circle of Indian Elders and Youth was held this year at Onondaga in central New York. There were several innovative elements, most importantly the inclusion of indigenous delegations from Australia, Africa, Greenland, and Central America. Also, one day was devoted to a joint introductory meeting involving our non-Indian friends who support the direction and purpose of the Traditional Circle of Indian Elders and Youth.

In January 1990, a major international meeting was held in Moscow, USSR. The Global Forum on Environment and Development for Survival invited representatives of the Traditional Circle of Elders to organize a worldwide delegation of traditional indigenous leaders to participate as one of the spiritual leaders' delegations to the Global Forum. Keynote speakers for the opening of the forum were women. Most significantly for our people, and for indigenous people around the world, one of the speakers was Iroquois Clan Mother Audrey Shenandoah from Onondaga. The other opening speaker was Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Prime Minister of Norway.

This Communiqué is adapted from the statement made by the indigenous delegation to the Moscow Global Forum, including members of the Traditional Circle of Indian Elders. Attached to the Communiqué is a series of reports generated from the Council of the Traditional Circle of Indian Elders and Youth held at Onondaga, August 16-21, 1990. Included are statements from both national and international representatives to the Onondaga Council.

Endorsement of the Statement Made by the Indigenous Delegation at the Global Forum on Environment and Development for Survival, Moscow, USSR, January 1990

The Traditional Circle of Indian Elders and Youth endorses the concepts of the Indigenous Delegation presented at the Moscow Forum: that we are all children of the Earth, that the Earth is governed by the great laws of the universe, and that we human beings are responsible for the neglect and violation of these laws.

We have agreed that there is now a crisis of life upon this planet because we, the human beings, have upset the balance of life-giving forces of the natural world, and have interfered with the structures and cycles of air, land, and water.

These great powers of the universe are now turning against us. Rain, the gift of life that waters the Earth, is now contaminating and killing gardens and trees of life that sustain us.

Our eldest brother the sun, whom we celebrate and cherish as he brings the dawn of each new day, now begins to throw rays of cancerous light, and new diseases stalk the earth. We tremble as we realize what we have done and are doing to our Mother Earth.

We have jeopardized the future of coming generations with our greed and lust for power. The warnings are clear, and time is now a factor.

We have challenged the laws of the universe that govern the natural world. We delight in our new technologies which reap harvests without regard to the life cycles of the natural world.

We speak of our children, yet we savage the spawning beds of the salmon and herring, and kill the whale in his home. We advance through the forests of the earth felling our rooted brothers indiscriminately, leaving no seeds for the future. We exploit the land and resources of the poor and the indigenous peoples of the world. We have become giants of destruction, and now we have gathered here to acknowledge this and to see what we must do to change.

Indigenous peoples possess many different cultures and lifestyles, but all recognize they are children of Mother Earth, and that we receive from her our life, our health, the air we breathe, the water we drink, our food and our energy. Earth suffers ill treatment because of lack of respect. All of us can understand the importance of the health of Mother Earth, and all have a potential to enjoy our lives in greater harmony with the forces that create life.

Brothers and sisters, we must return to the spiritual values that are the foundation of life. We must love and respect all living things. We must have compassion for the poor and the sick. We must have respect and understanding for women and all female life on this Earth which bears the sacred gift of life.

We must return to the prayers, ceremonies, meditations, rituals, and celebrations of thanksgiving which link us with the spiritual powers which sustain us, and, by example, teach our children this respect.

We must begin in earnest to educate those vast legions of human beings who are poor and oppressed. We must salvage their lands and resources for them, and support their self-sufficiency. Research for safe, appropriate technology which can enhance rural and small village life should begin immediately.

We must re-learn the great lessons of tolerance, generosity, and love that will bring us peace and future for the seventh generation to come. The path to human survival requires that we embrace a new age characterized by a global cultural pluralism which celebrates all the races, ethnicities, and religions of humankind. Indigenous cultures can help provide inspiration for a future in which love is extended beyond the confines of human society to embrace the natural world.

Indigenous languages, the eyes of the culture, are those closest to nature. Those languages and the stories of the people constitute a rich tradition steeped in delight at the wonders of the works of Creation, and an appreciation of our relatives the animals which can enrich all our lives and generate an environment of respect and love. Indigenous cultures developed unique and environmentally appropriate knowledge, often specific to their circumstances, which can be used to help reverse dangerous trends.

Children are the group most adversely affected by land and resource degradation. Special attentions should be paid to the needs of children. Every religious tradition has a view of the sacredness of life and of the relationship of nature to life. All traditions must be encouraged to advance and build upon that aspect through intensified education and renewed emphasis.

We are accountable, and shall be held accountable if we fail. Our responsibility is to protect Mother Earth. Nature is a seamless web of life in which all forms of life are related to all others -- the birds, the fish, the trees, the rocks -- we are all connected to that web.

Indigenous peoples are nature's representatives to the modern human community, a community that is destroying indigenous life.

Current development ideology maintains that the application of technology to generate large-scale production is a universal benefit. The practice of development often invites financial investment in projects that displace large numbers of people from their lands in order to produce a product for the marketplace. This process too often results in a debt burden which falls on the world's poorest peoples. The destructiveness of many of these kinds of projects if the real universal -- destruction of peoples, water, air, land, plants, animals, and future potential.

A sustainable development would do exactly the opposite, and therefore the ideology of the development must be brought into line with these realities.

Indigenous peoples, and only indigenous peoples, have demonstrated efficiency in taking care of the Earth. Indigenous cultures have provided the only historical models of sustainable development. A benevolent development must be defined as a process which benefits all, indigenous peoples included.

We, the indigenous peoples of the Earth, have a long experience of living on agreeable terms with the Earth. Is it possible that we can share our ancient knowledge with other peoples? Yes, surely. We shall go together in trust, in confidence, in belief, and we shall save our souls. This is the key to salvation.

We are peoples of the Earth. Earth is our place. Let us believe in it; let us take care of it as we take care of our children, our parents, and grandparents. We are peoples of the Earth.

We must remember that we receive the benefits of Mother Earth from the Creator, and that we have a great responsibility to care for her and heal her. We have this duty and privilege to carry out in respect for our ancestors and for the coming generations.

Daw Nay Toh

The Traditional Circle of Indian Elders and Youth
Onondaga Nation
via Nedrow, New York
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