



## **American Indian Law Alliance**

NGO in consultative status with the Economic & Social Council

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### **Oral intervention presented by Betty Lyons (Onondaga Nation) in "Regional cases of autonomy in the territories of Indigenous Peoples" at the UN International Expert Group Meeting, 23-25 January 2018.**

First, I want to take this opportunity to thank the commitment shown by Ms. Daniella Bas, the Permanent Forum Members, the presenters and most importantly the Secretariat's office of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues that works tirelessly with an ever-shrinking budget and staff and yet the level of work only increases and the work continues to get done. Nya wenha.

I am here on behalf of the American Indian Law Alliance but also as a member of the Haudenosaunee External Relations Committee. I always start by saying that I am a proud citizen of the Onondaga Nation, which is part of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, which is the first known democracy based on consensus.

This is a different perspective than both the presenters today. You will hear many nations refer to themselves as 'tribes.' The word 'tribe' was a term used and created by the United States Government to diminish our status and I encourage our Nations to stop using it. The domestication of Indigenous Nations' issues by some UN Member States is very dangerous and something we need to all be aware of.

When talking about autonomy in the territories of Indigenous Peoples we should talk about us as Nations of Peoples. That is a very important distinction. Part of our effectiveness as the Onondaga Nation and Haudenosaunee Confederacy is the strength of our individual Nations as well as the strength in our unity and the determination to ensure that we are a thriving Nation for future generations.

To provide some background, the Haudenosaunee is a government whose treaties with the United States, Canada and other powers, are important valid living documents that shaped the foundation of the relationship between our respective Nations. The United States patterned their government after ours. Unfortunately, they left out two important things: the treatment of women or the treatment of Mother Earth. And that is part of the reason for the imbalances we see today.

There are many treaties between our peoples but two notable ones are the Guswenta, or Two Row Wampum Treaty of 1613, made between our peoples. It talks about keeping our culture, traditions, way of life and laws in our canoe--and this was first made with the Dutch and then adopted by the US and Canada--and it says that they

would keep their culture, traditions, way of life and laws in their ship. We would never interfere in each other's government or pass laws against one another.

The other treaty is the Canandaigua Treaty of 1794, which we still polish the chain of peace and friendship with the US, as recently as 2015.

The Onondaga Nation is the model for best practice for self-determination, sovereignty and good governance. The Onondaga Nation does not accept funding from the US Federal Government. Citizens of the Onondaga Nation do not vote in the election process of the US; as we have our own system of government that has been handed down generation to generation since time immemorial. This has been crucial in maintaining our autonomy. Our Ceremonies, culture and language have also been paramount in maintaining this autonomy. Our right to self-determination and governance is ours and non-negotiable.

The Haudenosaunee travel on our own passports as we are citizens of our own respective Nations. I have mine with me if anyone would like to look at it.

It is also important to note that the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which is a United States federal government agency, is not on our Nation or affiliated with our Nation. We do not have a casino or any gambling facility on our Nation. The Onondaga Nation owned and operated businesses fund a variety of programs and services for the citizens of the Onondaga Nation while also offering employment to our Nation's Citizens.

The Onondaga Nation offers home building, Elders programs, youth programs, language program, food sovereignty and protection, drug and alcohol rehab facility, family services, employee assistance, job training and placement, energy assistance, waterworks, (we had to supply our own water because the watershed is contaminated by the same company that contaminated our sacred Onondaga Lake). This also proves that what happens off our Nation also affects us as our Sami brother Eirik Larsen stated when he said the water is warming, ice is melting and this is affecting all living beings.

We also have a state of the art Onondaga Nation fire station made with green infrastructure with first responders. Also, the Onondaga Nation Arena, the Onondaga Nation Field House, Iroquois Nationals Lacrosse Team, all sports programs, as well as offering assistance to all nations of the Haudenosaunee.

I want to echo our sister Joan Carling and also give a voice to all living, spiritual, feeling beings, including the wind, water, animals, medicinal plants, fish. I won't name them all but...all living beings, we all have duties and responsibilities to work in harmony with one another. We as humans are not better than other living beings but equal to them. They are not commodities.

We would like to see ECOSOC help Indigenous Peoples and Nations change the language and dialogue to include all living things and to stop separating them. We could not live without our heart or lungs nor could we live without clean water and clean air. This will help shift the paradigm in the state's perspective that everything has its own separate category and will show that connectedness to oneself. This is a value that all Indigenous Peoples and Nations have and is imperative for all of our survival

This morning, Joan Carling spoke of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Goal 7: 'Ensure Access to Affordable, Reliable, Sustainable and Modern Energy for All.' We believe that sustainable development will lead to more economic empowerment for our Nation. The Onondaga Nation is now looking into converting a dam located on the Nation, which was imposed on our Nation, into a sustainable energy park. As we know, with power comes power. They have the power to shut us off at any times and we will not allow that.

One of the Onondaga Nation's businesses is a vertical greenhouse that can attach to any size building in urban areas, offering a food source to many deprived areas that don't have access to land or clean water.

Our Nation and Confederacy make decisions based on how those decisions will affect the Seventh Generation yet unborn and that we take this very seriously.

ECOSOC could assist with the difficult but ignored subject of the Doctrine of Discovery, as we cannot continue to ignore the affects as we deal with the legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery on a regular basis. Through education, UN Agencies and UN Member States can and need to gain a new perspective on the treatments of Indigenous Peoples and Nations. We have the understanding that human rights are only for humans but collective rights are for all living beings.

Our suggestion is that ECOSOC have a method of measurement to determine how well a UN Member State is doing in implementing the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. And we hope those findings are made available to everyone.

If funding were not an issue, perhaps ECOSOC could assist in capacity building among Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Nations as well as between Indigenous peoples and Nations with UN Member States and UN Agencies.

ECOSOC needs to strengthen the participation of Indigenous Peoples and Nations and we hope the processes of participation could stop changing. As our sister, Rocio said in regard to the second week of the UNPFII and the closed meetings with the Permanent Forum Members and States. It is imperative to ensure participation for all of us. Some of our folks don't have access to the internet and the UNPFII website is not always user friendly.

I would also encourage Permanent Forum Members, UN Member States and UN Agencies to be mindful, as Joan Carling stated earlier, that there is always an expectation of a trade-off. Frankly we have given enough. We have nothing left to give.

Lastly, echoing our sister Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, the protection of our rights has to come first. We Indigenous Peoples and Nations, we are our own experts anything involving us must include us, with our free, prior, and informed consent. Our right to self-determination and our sovereignty are inherent. We hope all peoples will see the value in protecting the Territorial Integrity of Mother Earth. Thank you.

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