

This speech was transcribed from audio tape by: Craig Carpenter, P.O. Box 590, Hoopa, CA 95546.  
I wish to express my appreciation for his effort. -mosa

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Haudenosaunee Faithkeeper, Chief Oren Lyons  
addressing delegates to the United Nations Organization  
opened "The Year of the Indigenous Peoples" (1993)  
in the United Nations General Assembly Auditorium,  
United Nations Plaza, New York City, December 10, 1992.

This is (verbatim) that opening statement:

For all of us. I am Oren Lyons, Hau de no sau nee, and speaking on behalf of the Indigenous People of North America, this Great Turtle Island. Mr. President, distinguished delegates, Chiefs, Clan Mothers, Leaders and Members of the World's Indigenous Nations and Peoples, we thank you, The General Assembly, for the recognition and the proclamation of "1993, The International Year of the Indigenous Peoples," for the theme of, "Indigenous Peoples, a New Partnership." We thank Madam Chairman Repal Chur (sp?) of the Working Group for Indigenous Populations for consistent, enthusiastic support, and Diaz. And at this time, we recognize the inspiration and spiritual force of Augusto Williamson Diaz, for his vision of such a day as this, and our gratitude to those leaders of Indigenous Peoples and people who also had the vision of this day for our people, who put their blood, their sweat and their tears into this moment. And to those who are no longer here, our profound gratitude and appreciation.

This proclamation brings home inspiration and renewed dedication to our quest for self-determination, justice, freedom and peace in our Homelands and our Territories. Indeed, the quest is a renewal of what we enjoyed before the coming of our White Brothers from across the sea. We lived contentedly under the Gai Eneshah Go' Nah, The Great Law of Peace. We were instructed to create societies based on the principles of Peace, Equity, Justice, and the Power of Good Minds.

Our societies are based upon great democratic principles of the authority of the people and equal responsibilities for the men and the women. This was a great way of life across this Great Turtle Island and freedom with respect was everywhere. Our leaders were instructed to be men of vision and to make every decision on behalf of the seventh generation to come; to have compassion and love for those generations yet unborn. We were instructed to give thanks for All That Sustains Us.

Thus, we created great ceremonies of thanksgiving for the life-giving forces of the Natural World, as long as we carried out our ceremonies, life would continue. We were told that 'The Seed is the Law.' Indeed, it is The Law of Life. It is The Law of Regeneration. Within the seed is the mysterious force of life and creation. Our mothers nurture and guard that seed and we respect and love them for that. Just as we love I hi do' hah, our Mother Earth, for the same spiritual work and mystery.

We were instructed to be generous and to share equally with our brothers and sisters so that all may be content. We were instructed to respect and love our Elders, to serve them in their declining years, to cherish one another. We were instructed to love our children, indeed, to love *ALL* children. We were told that there would come a time when parents would fail this obligation and we could judge the decline of humanity by how we treat our children.

We were told that there would come a time when the world would be covered with smoke, and that it would take our elders and our children. It was difficult to comprehend at the time, but now all we have to do is but to walk outside to experience that statement. We were told that there would come a time when we could not find clean water to wash ourselves, to cook our foods, to make our medicines, and to drink. And there would be disease and great suffering. Today we can see this and we peer into the future with great apprehension. We were told there would come a time when, tending our gardens, we would pull up our plants and the vines would be empty. Our precious seed would begin to disappear. We were instructed that we would see a time when young men would pace back and forth in front of their chiefs and leaders in defiance and confusion.

There are some specific issues I must bring forward on behalf of our Nations and Peoples.

North America. The issue of nuclear and toxic waste dumps on our precious lands; the policy of finding a place for the waste with the poorest and most defenseless of peoples today. This brings the issue of the degradation of our environment by these waste dumps, over-fishing, over-cutting of timber, and toxic chemicals from mining processes throughout our lands.

Treaty violations. We have with the United States and Canada 371 ratified Treaties and Agreements. The Ruby Valley Treaty of the Western Shoshone is a prime example of what the violation of treaties brings: human rights violations, forced removals, disenfranchisements of traditional people with confiscations of their property and livestock.

The refusal to recognize and support religious freedoms of our people and the decisions by the [U.S.] Supreme Court which incorporates this attitude into Federal Law. This translates into the violation of Sacred Sites. Mt. Graham in the Apache Country is now a project site for an observatory, causing great stress to the Apache People who have depended upon the spiritual forces of this mountain for survival. Ironically, a partner in this project is the Vatican. And even further, it has proposed to name this project 'Columbus.'

The appropriation of our intellectual properties is continuous and devastating. Land is the issue. Land has always been the issue with Indigenous Peoples. Original title is a problem for all of you. We must try to reach an agreement on a more level playing field that allows us to, at least, a chance for survival.

Our brother, Leonard Peltier, has been too long in prison, In 1993, to signal a new attitude -- and what better than his release after 16 years -- symbolic of the exercise of dominion over our Peoples.

All this has come from across the seas. The catastrophes that we have suffered at the hands of our brothers from across the seas has been unremitting and inexcusable. It has crushed our people, and our Nations down through the centuries. You brought us disease and death and the idea of Christian dominion over heathens, pagans, savages. Our lands were declared 'vacant' by Papal Bulls, which created law to justify the pillaging of our land.

We were systematically stripped of our resources, religions and dignity. Indeed, we became resources of labor for goldmines and canefields. Life for us was unspeakable, cruel. Our black and dark-skinned brothers and sisters were brought here from distant lands to share our misery and suffering and death.

Yet we survived. I stand before you as a manifestation of the spirit of our people and our will to survive. The Wolf, our Spiritual Brother, stands beside us and we are alike in the Western mind: hated, admired, and still a mystery to you, and still undefeated.

So then, what is the message I bring to you today? Is it our common future? It seems to me that we are living in a time of prophecy, a time of definitions and decisions. We are the generation with the responsibilities and the option to choose the The Path of Life for the future of our children. Or the life and path which defies the Laws of Regeneration.

Even though you and I are in different boats, you in your boat and we in our canoe, we share the same River of Life. What befalls me, befalls you. And downstream, downstream in this River of Life, our children will pay for our selfishness, for our greed, and for our lack of vision.

500 years ago, you came to our pristine lands of great forests, rolling plains, crystal clear lakes and streams and rivers. And we have suffered in your quest for God, for Glory, for Gold. But, we have survived. Can we survive another 500 years of "sustainable development?" I don't think so. Not in the definitions that put 'sustainable' in today. I don't think so.

So reality and the Natural Law will prevail; The Law of the Seed and Regeneration. We can still alter our course. It is *NOT* too late. We still have options. We need the courage to change our values to the regeneration of our families, the life that surrounds us. Given this opportunity, we can raise ourselves. We must join hands with the rest of Creation and speak of Common Sense, Responsibility, Brotherhood, and PEACE. We must understand that the law *is* the seed and only as true partners can we survive.

On behalf of the Indigenous People of the Great Turtle Island, I give my appreciation and thanks. Dah ney' to. Now I am finished.

(Oren Lyons received a standing ovation and shouts of approval from Indian spectators.)