

First Nations

By Wilbur Norman

Dealers and collectors of historic and ancient tribal art and artifacts sometimes forget that tribal peoples, i.e. indigenous people, are very much a part of today's landscape. Indigenous peoples, often defined as any ethnic group who inhabit a geographic region with which they have the earliest known historical connection (and who do not as a group control the national government of the countries within which they live), are very much alive and kicking though many of us have little contact with these descendant communities.

In an address to the White House Tribal Nations Conference on December 16, 2010 President Obama announced that the United States will, at last, endorse the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

In 2007, when the Declaration was adopted by the UN General Assembly, the vote was 143 nations affirming and four nations against. Those four were Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. The United States was the last holdout with Canada signing on a month ago, New Zealand last April and Australia in 2009.

In his Presidential Proclamation last month honoring National Native American Heritage Month, President Obama recommitted to supporting tribal self-determination, security and prosperity for all Native Americans, saying he recognized that while we cannot erase the scourges or broken promises of our past, we will move ahead

together in writing a new, brighter chapter in our joint history.

That these English-speaking nations held out at all is representative of the situation almost all indigenous peoples face around the world. And, while their numbers are shrinking in some countries, these four nations hold large, growing populations of native peoples.

The World Council of Indigenous Peoples, dissolved in 1996, claimed to represent over 60,000,000 indigenous peoples worldwide. In the U.S. there are 565 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages with 4.5 million people or 1.5 per cent of the total U.S. population (2000 Census.) There are currently over 630 recognized First Nations governments or bands spread across Canada, roughly half of which are in the provinces of Ontario and British Columbia. Their total population is nearly 700,000 people. In Australia, where there are thought to have been between 400 to 700 aboriginal tribes before colonization, there are now several hundred tribes with an estimated (2007) population of 200,000 (and 517,000 of mixed ancestry.) In New Zealand there are about 500,000 Maori with about 95% being of mixed Maori/European descent.

It is about time that the United States supports this UN Declaration for, among others, our First Americans.

Reprinted From:

Last Word

The ATADA NEWS

Winter 2011