



## The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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June 10, 2009

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Rex Lee Jim participates in U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York City, shares Navajo ideas with developing indigenous nations**

*"I truly believe the Navajo Nation is ahead in so many ways in respect to sovereignty and self-government." – Rex Lee Jim, Navajo Nation Council delegate*

**NEW YORK CITY** — Navajo Nation Council Delegate Rex Lee Jim attended the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on May 26-29 in New York City where he participated in discussions relating to worldwide economic and social development issues.

The U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues meets for ten days each year at the United Nations' headquarters in New York City and consists of a high-level advisory body that deals with indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, environment, education, health and human rights.

Jim said the United Nation's forum serves as an opportunity to for the Navajo Nation to share ideas with developing Indigenous nations around the world.

"We're able to share our experiences as a government, both positive and negative," Jim said. "In that way, we have become world leaders for Indigenous nations here."

Jim said promoting Indigenous government is essential to retaining cultural values.

"Some Indigenous Nations believe the right to self-determination means to vote in national elections," he said. "For many Indigenous people around the world, they are fighting for the basic right to vote. What we're showing them as a Navajo Nation is you can go beyond that and create your own government."

The U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues cleared a major obstacle on Sept. 13, 2007, when the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the General Assembly. The Declaration is a culmination of more than 20 years of work that began in earnest at the Working Group, which began the drafting of the declaration in 1985. The first draft was completed in 1993, and in 1995, the Commission on Human Rights set up its own working group to review the draft adopted by the human rights experts of the Working Group and the Sub-Commission. More than 100 indigenous organizations participate annually in the Working Group of the Commission.

The declaration is the most comprehensive statement of the rights of indigenous peoples ever developed, giving prominence to collective rights to a degree unprecedented in international human rights law. The adoption of this instrument is the clearest indication yet that the international community is committing itself to the protection of the individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples.

The adoption of the declaration was greatly celebrated among Indigenous communities, but now, the goal is to get it implemented.

"People think implementation is easy, but it's not," Jim added. "We still have a lot of work to do."

Jim said creating language for the Declaration of Indigenous Rights is a tedious and intense process since leaders have to address and create language with an international mindset.

"When you get to work at this level, sometimes you realize what is good for Navajo might destroy another Indigenous group and what's good for that small group may be bad for Navajo," he said. "There are Indigenous groups in the Amazon who are in voluntary isolation. The declaration must be worded in a way where we protect them. At times, we'll let go of language for that group."

Jim was at a United Nations conference in March where there was heavy discussion on the implementation of Article 42 of the Declaration, which would give Indigenous people direct participation in the United Nations.

"We should be able to play a more active role in how monies are spent and how decisions are made," he added. "Discussion and debate on the article continues."

While the Navajo Nation faces many challenges in the development of their tribal government, Jim is confident the Navajo Nation is making progress, especially when taking into consideration the daunting obstacles facing other Indigenous groups.

"I truly believe the Navajo Nation is ahead in so many ways in respect to sovereignty and self-government," said Jim, who has recommended the Navajo Nation for case studies examining developing indigenous governments.

Indigenous peoples around the world have sought recognition of their identities, their ways of life and their right to traditional lands, territories and natural resources, yet throughout history, their rights have been violated. Indigenous peoples are arguably among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of people in the world today. The international community now recognizes that special measures are required to protect the rights of the world's indigenous peoples.

"The Navajo Nation needs to start preparing ourselves for the international issues," he said. "We need to be thinking 50 years down the road, 500 years down the road. How do we position ourselves do put ourselves in a position to help other Indigenous people?"

The final reports from the forum are still being compiled. To review a copy of the most up to date report, visit <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/sessions.html>.

The United Nations is an international organization whose stated goals are to facilitate cooperation in international law, international security, economic development, social progress, human rights and achieving world peace. The United Nations was founded in 1945 after World War II to replace the League of Nations, to stop wars between countries and to provide a platform for dialogue. There are currently 192 member states, including nearly every recognized independent state in the world. From its headquarters on international territory in New York City, the United Nations and its specialized agencies decide on substantive and administrative issues in regular meetings held throughout the year.

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