



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Council members applaud approval of American Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

WINDOW ROCK – Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse’Daa’Kaan, Upper Fruitland) and the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission are pleased that the Organization of American States (“OAS”) working group unanimously approved the American Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples today.

The Navajo Nation Council has sent numerous delegations to the United Nations and OAS to advocate for the protection of Navajo human rights during meetings with international officials.

The Navajo Nation Council’s Naabik’iyáti’ Committee established the Subcommittee on Sacred Sites. Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill) participated in the 19th meeting of the OAS working group meeting in Washington, D.C. Speaker Bates also authorized the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission executive director Leonard Gorman, to attend the meeting as well.

This afternoon, the OAS working group unanimously approved the draft American declaration. It was a 20-year development that required participation by many indigenous organizations and nations from the western hemisphere.

“Reaching an approved outcome document from the OAS is an achievement that can also be used to hold accountable members states to make additional efforts to protect, promote, and recognize such rights in policy, planning, in laws and in courts,” said Delegate Witherspoon.

While the American declaration clarifies many aspects of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007, it was also evident that there remain reservations by some states in the Americas regarding indigenous human rights.

“Navajo Nation was very insistent on assuring that UNDRIP is the minimum standard for the American declaration. Mexico facilitated the indigenous caucus position in order for the states to approve in the declaration that UNDRIP is in fact the minimum standard for the American declaration,” Gorman stated.

While several states insisted that land rights for indigenous peoples be interpreted in accordance with the respective state laws, the indigenous caucus insisted that new thinking and standards must be facilitated in the American declaration.

Navajo officials acknowledge the American declaration specifically recognizes the protection of sacred sites, which was not expressly incorporated in UNDRIP.

“The Naabik’iyátí’ Committee envisioned that Navajo and other indigenous peoples’ sacred places and sites must be protected. With this foresight, Navajo Nation representatives advanced the need for the American declaration to clearly address sacred sites and ceremonial objects.”

Based on the decision by the OAS working group, the next step is for the American declaration to be channeled through the OAS process for it to be adopted by OAS General Assembly this summer.

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