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Delegate Brown and Human Rights Commission advocate for the Navajo Nation to be an official member of the United Nations

Photo: Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (second from left), Navajo Human Rights Commission staff, and representatives from other Indigenous nations provided testimony at the United Nations regarding recognizing Indigenous nations as participating UN members in New York City, New York on Jan. 31, 2017.

NEW YORK CITY – This week, Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) along with the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission, attended the "Intervention on Enabling the Participation of Indigenous Governing Institutions at the United Nations on Participation Modalities," to advocate for the Navajo Nation to become an official member of the United Nations.

Delegate Brown, along with several Indigenous Nations, presented before the United Nations and stated that the Navajo Nation should no long be considered a “non-governmental organization,” or NGO, due to the Navajo Nation’s sovereign status, which allows its citizens to elect officials to represent the Nation on behalf of the Navajo people.

“While NGOs and civil societies enjoy the privilege of participating in the United Nations, Indigenous nations with elected officials that are responsible to their people are limited in full participation within the UN,” stated Delegate Brown. “These include the right to speak, recommend agenda items, have a seat in the General Assembly, and submit written comments and recommendations.”

Delegate Brown said the UN must establish a new category that ensures that indigenous governing institutions are, at the very minimum, able to participate in all meetings to the fullest extent regarding issues that may affect the Navajo people, their land, territories, and resources.

On Jan. 5, the Naabik’íyáti’ Committee passed a resolution that established its official position to advocate for the special recognition status of the Navajo Nation before the UN. The special recognition status, at a minimum, would allow the Nation to be a permanent observer and to independently represent and advance the best interests of Diné citizens.

Delegate Brown also stressed the importance of supporting other Indigenous nations from around the world because they all face many of the same important issues that affect their people and land areas.

“We are working to continue addressing human rights issues that are critical to aid in shaping our laws to honor and protect our women and all Indigenous people,” said Delegate Brown. “Now, more than ever, we as Indigenous people need to speak up to protect our natural resources, land, water, sacred sites, language, and culture for our future generations.”

Delegate Brown added that as elected delegates of the Navajo Nation, there is a need to ensure they have a voice within the international arena, which will encourage further progress toward self-determination and Diné sustainability for younger generations to come.

Executive director for the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission Leonard Gorman said it was important for the Navajo Nation to provide input and to be able to speak on the floor of the UN regarding issues directly affecting Indigenous people.

"Navajo Nation has been involved in international advocacy for several decades. Along the way, Navajo has had input in the adoption of UNDRIP, American Declaration, and now formulating procedures for Indigenous peoples to participate in the UN systems as nations and governments,” said Gorman. “They need to have a seat at the UN table and speak out for our Navajo people.”

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