

68th UNGA Third Committee 2013
Agenda Item 66, “Rights of Indigenous Peoples”
19th meeting, Monday, October 21, 2013
United States Statement
delivered by Laurie Shestack Phipps, Adviser

Thank you. The United States is pleased to offer our thoughts on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The United States is committed to supporting the Declaration through the work of individual U.S. government agencies which look to the Declaration as they work with tribal leaders to address the many concerns of tribal communities. Parts of the U.S. government that touch on these issues range from the Department of the Interior, Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, and Department of Housing and Urban Development, to the Department of Justice, Department of State, as well as the White House.

We have taken concrete steps, including legal and policy measures, that operationalize our support for the Declaration. A detailed listing of federal policies and programs appears in the December 2012 document “Continuing the Progress in Tribal Communities,” which can be found on the White House website. The report was prepared in connection with the 2012 White House Tribal Nations Conference, and outlines actions concerning not only strengthening our government-to-government relationship with tribes, but also strengthening sustainable economic development, health care, public safety, education, protection of Native American lands and the environment, and respect for their cultures.

The 2013 Tribal National Conference, currently scheduled for Wednesday, November 13, offers an opportunity for continued U.S. and tribal government partnership to improve the situation of indigenous peoples in the United States.

The newly established White House Native American Affairs Council will provide more frequent opportunities for consultation. The Council, established through a June 2013 Executive Order, will meet three times a year and be chaired by Secretary of the Interior Jewell. Its five major focus areas are:

- Tribal economies;
- Health and nutrition;
- Education;
- Promoting safety in tribal communities; and

- Natural resource protection and the environment, which includes climate change.

These issues are among the major concerns of indigenous communities.

Mr. Chair, turning from our domestic actions to the multilateral arena, we believe it is important to ensure that the upcoming World Conference on Indigenous Peoples enables a similar level of effective and meaningful interaction within the United Nations with indigenous representatives as we have established within the United States. To that end, we will work with other delegations and with the office of the President of the General Assembly to agree on appropriate mechanisms for allowing representatives of recognized tribal governments to participate in the World Conference. The North American region is perhaps unique in the official nature of the relationship between indigenous peoples, which are represented by tribal or Aboriginal governments, and the federal governments of the United States and Canada. Neither the term “non-governmental organization” nor “civil society organization” accurately describes the recognized indigenous representatives in the United States. We look forward to refining the language agreed to in the modalities resolution on the World Conference (66/296) to allow for the participation of elected and traditional representatives from our region.

Thank you for your attention. The United States looks forward to continued engagement with member states, tribal governments, the UN system, and others to better the situation of indigenous peoples.