

Michael Anderson presentation

First Nations Peoples Struggle.

Why did I come to the United Nations?

In 1981, the nationally elected National Aboriginal Conference (NAC) engaged me to write position papers for the 2nd World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) conference that they were hosting in Canberra, Australia

This was also a time when the National Aboriginal Conference representing Aboriginal Australia, were in the process of preparing a Treaty to treat with the Commonwealth Government of Australia representing Non-Indigenous Australians. At the conclusion of a very successful WCIP, the National Aboriginal Conference was advised that the United Nations were to conduct a gathering of the World's First Nations Peoples in Geneva.

This was viewed as a great opportunity in modern history, for the First Nations peoples of the world to have their voices heard as a collective. What made this event even more important was the fact that the majority of First Nations peoples had had a shared history when it came to the 17th-18th century imperial expansion.

The National Aboriginal Conference adopted the view, that, this was a time when we as First Nations Peoples could compare the destruction of our peoples and our unique cultures by the imperial invaders. Now the United Nations were providing a forum where we First Nations Peoples could be heard and thereby set a new pathway for a conciliatory and peaceful means by which we could find common grounds for the settling of centuries of denial.

What was the situation and expectations of your people at that time?

At the time of this historic gathering, there were no expectations. The fact that the United Nations were hosting such an event provided hope.

Domestically, we were struggling against a dominant society who held our Peoples in Australian as prisoners of the State. Like the Gulags of the former Soviet Union, we were locked away, out of sight, out of mind, not for any crime that we had committed, but, just because we were Aboriginal people.

It was against the backdrop of this history that we felt that a new dawning had come.

In 1979, Jim Hagan (Chairman NAC), Reginald Birch and a staffer from the National Aboriginal Conference attended the UN in Geneva to speak to the CERD and other UN Human Rights bodies, in an effort to gain support to prevent Mining Companies from riding rough shod over Aboriginal nations and their lands without their free prior and informed consent. This experience from the visit by the people named gave great encouragement to Aboriginal people in Australia that the UN were a political institution that could assist in defining future pathways for locating solutions.

What was the role of the spirituality, of the women, of the UN ?

This matter continues to be evolving, as the greater percentage of Aboriginal Peoples are indeed matriarchal. The spirituality of our culture and peoples are recognised as coming from the women. It would be a dis-service to many Aboriginal people if the UN were to demand a line of demarcation between men and women.

Which obstacles did you encounter while promoting the rights of your people and how they were overcome ?

The primary difficulties that we in Australia find, is the lack of resources. Aboriginal people generally, would be much more active within the UN advocating human rights abuses if the resources were available. As an example of this, etc etc

How did you continue the process (internationally or in your country) ?

Majority of the Aboriginal People continue their struggle through personally financing their struggle against the Tyranny of the Governments within Australia. The added problems that are new to Aboriginal people, are the activity of the Trans-National Corporations in developing strategies and ambitions to exploit our mineral, gas and oil resources without our free, prior and informed consent. Moreover, Aboriginal people are NOT gaining any 'real' benefits.

What were the achievements, failures and examples of successful practices?

The achievements that had been made over the past 40 years in Australia has now been taken away and dismantled by consecutive governments. Self-determination is no longer an option for Aboriginal people within Australia. Self-management is not a right. It is a plan of action by Governments on what we as people can and cannot do.

Aboriginal people's failures are viewed as a waste of effort. But no input was made by governments to assist in Aboriginal communities to advance their operations, they chose to just closing down the organisations and the right of self-determination is denied and the policy of assimilation is now the paramount objective.

How do you evaluate the nowadays international process?

As Aboriginal peoples of the world, it is important that we now advance our positions in reasserting our pre-Existing Statehood under international law. Doing this, will, put us in a position of power that will equate with that of our invaders and thereby complete the process of d-colonisation.

Where some Peoples, were conquered, it must be accepted that their laws under their ancient cultures prior to the conquest, remain in force until otherwise altered. If this has not been done then, it is time for history to catch up so that we can correct the injustices of the past and those that continues to haunt us to this day. Internal de-colonisation is imperative for many First Nations Peoples and repatriation programs must now be set in place for those who had been forcibly displaced. This program must include reparations and compensation for the victims of gross violation of Human Rights.

What are future perspectives for young generation of your people? Etc

The youth of today must be made aware, that, the United Nations Human Rights and other rights associated with de-colonization are very relevant to the worlds Aboriginal Peoples. This will assist them to understand that they have rights and interests outside of their own domestic sphere. Having been made Aware of these facts, the youth will then have a better understanding of how to prepare their people to assert their basic and fundamental rights.