
CLOSING REMARKS & SPONTANEOUS PRESENTATION PERIOD

Date: February 26, 2000
Location: First Nations House of Learning
Moderator: Augusto Willemsen Diaz

PRESENTER ONE

Those in the wording, and I'll have to think about it a little to do that, but I'll just try and explain the concept. And I commend the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs and the people for this conference, and I commend the paper and the spirit that this document was put together in, and I think it needs to be strengthened. It is a good document. I am a traditional knowledge keeper, as well, so I speak from that position. I know one of the situations is developing in native communities is . . . I don't see where the wording will go in here, but one of the issues I think that needs to be included here is that within the indigenous communities, at least in Canada I'm not speaking about anywhere else, but I think this is a document being developed out of this conference by the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, is that there has been a breakdown in our communities in terms of traditional knowledge, and non-traditional knowledge or more contemporary work where that knowledge has been eroded, and so a lot of times there's a misunderstanding regarding consultation with elders, or regarding consultation with traditional knowledge keepers. I think there needs to be a differentiation made there. I know a lot of elders older than me who don't have the knowledge that I have, because I belong to a society of medicine keepers, medicine plants on our territory, I know the name of every medicine on our territory, how to make them, how to use them, and how to protect them. And we're given those instructions through our family lines. And so, when you say consultation with elders, the wording in here somehow has to encompass that, and somehow had to understand that there has been a serious loss as a result of the racialization that occurred through the residential school, and the Christianization and the education. So I just wanted to mention that, I need to find that in here somewhere.

MODERATOR DIAZ

Yes, would you kindly suggest the way that we should consider doing that on the text, so as to take fully into account and in the appropriate place of the document what you have suggested.

PRESENTER ONE, CONTINUED. . .

I will definitely help with that. I come from the same reservation that Chief Phillip Stewart comes from, he knows what I'm talking about, and I'll consult with him and you know whoever, U.B.C.I.C., to do whatever I need to do to help with that.

MODERATOR DIAZ

Thank you.

MODERATOR'S ASSISTANT

In more academic terms, it sounds like the last couple speakers are talking about a research protocol or an accountability framework that we should also mention in here, and lay out some very specific criteria for what constitutes accountability and how to ensure accountability in the research and the knowledge that's being transferred. And I think that's a good suggestion, myself.

PRESENTER TWO

My name's Debra Harry. I'm the Executive Director for the Indigenous Peoples Council on Biocolonialism. I think a clear thread of thinking through this conference was one of sovereignty, and I believe that if you read the document it doesn't assert our position as indigenous peoples from a position of sovereignty. Clearly, the paradigm that we exist within and that is the source of all of our problems is the paradigm of oppression, of subjugation, of colonization. I think we have to be forthright in our assertion of our rights to define our own knowledge, to protect our own resources on our terms for ourselves and for future generations. That is an inherent right, and that's the point, that's the starting point from which we start to develop all other thinking. All other principles flow from that. So, I would suggest some language that maybe is, I think I see the language in here but I feel like it's not strong enough. I think we have to be proactive in making that assertion, because clearly the oppressor is not interested in looking at our sovereignty and acknowledging our sovereignty. Only we can assert our sovereignty, and that includes establishing legal frameworks, "laying down the law," saying that, whether it be in research protocols or governmental ordinances, or whatever, that say this is how things will be and do it for ourselves. Go into a proactive mode.

MODERATOR DIAZ

Thank-you very much. Would you kindly . . . I would like to repeat that we would ask you kindly to note this on your text and give it, put it at our disposal so that it can be fully taken into account. Would then be *(unknown word) this *(unknown word) . Thank-you.

PRESENTER THREE

I think that there is some very good points being made about indigenous knowledge, about who has the authority in our systems to speak on those things. I come from the Heiltsuk Nation, we have a system called *(unknown word) , maybe my language skills are a little bit shaky but that's how, the best I can do. It's a system of our laws. I think, I agree that we need to *(unknown word) work within our indigenous legal systems, and recognizing that those legal systems aren't the same across the Nations. Also, recognizing that there's different types of knowledge, in our word I think it' spoken to a bird *(unknown word) . Some of our neighbours to the south of us where some of the knowledge is owned by families, clans, or . . . anthropologists' have words for them. It's a system of people with one *(unknown word) descent and they own things. It doesn't belong to the Nation, like the First Nation, it belongs to those . . . I don't know how it is in other Nations. Also, we have to recognize that we are partly in a situation now where a lot of our people have been put through a lot, where they don't no longer understand that. So there's probably a process of relearning these. For us, we've lost to an un *(unknown word) try to implement them and have other people respect them. It's not something you can just say "Oh, it's unchanged and everyone understands it." That's not how it works. I hope I'm not offending any people from my Nation who are here, but I've seen and heard a lot of the discussion all day *(unknown word) and it's a process. I think it's probably good to talk like this and put something forward, but realizing that there is some growing that needs to be carried out *(unknown word) , and we need to be . . . I think some of that's covered off in ensuring that the children understand the options *(unknown word) , and *(unknown word) within that legal system of ours. And it's not just the children, it's also some of the adults who have a long ways to go to be able to implement that within our own system. So, I don't know if that's helpful or not but I think the general intent of this is good. I agree with what some of the speakers are saying about recognizing you got to identify who owns that knowledge and it should be done properly. And it's not just necessarily the Tribal Council or Band Council that has the right to somebody's songs, that's not how it works in our system. So, the intent, I think, is to follow the old ways of "Who has the rights to these?" If that's what you mean, I would agree with that basically.

MODERATOR DIAZ

Thank-you, that's good.

MODERATOR'S ASSISTANT

I think it's good for people to vocalize, even if it's not going to make it's way into the text of the document. It's good for you to say and for us to hear it, because for a lot of us the document isn't going to be the thing that gets translated into action over time, it's going to be the spirit and the words and the values and the principles that we work out in our own mind, that resonate and that get translated into action later. So, whether or not it gets made into text, I think, is another point, but it's good to hear you say it, perspective *(unknown word) and every else *(unknown word) .

PRESENTER FOUR

Yes, just a question to Mr. Diaz. You worked with the United Nations Human Rights Commission? Is that right? Did you previously work with the United Nations Human Rights Commission?

[Diaz] Yes.

[Presenter Four] In '81?

[Diaz] In '81, yes. From '55 to '84.

[Presenter Four] I think you were the gentleman who gave me protection from the Australian Security Police, federal police, in '81. It was arranged through a man called DelRiley of the Metis' National Indian Brotherhood in Ottawa in '81, when the Australian federal police came after me to take me home to stop me from going to the U.N.. You met me at the airport. And I just wanted to, I never had an opportunity to thank-you, but I'd like to say thank-you now, because that was nineteen years ago. Thank-you very much for that.

What I'm hearing right now is really motivational, and it's good I think. We heard some people talk about us having the need to decolonize our minds and start being aborigines again and asserting our rights. I heard someone say yesterday while we were talking about sovereignty, the governments and the others *(unknown word) and the multinational corporations were going around taking everything from us, and we were walking around talking about sovereignty. And only a month ago an elder came to me in a meeting back home in Australia and said "What is sovereignty? How does that work on the ground for us? How do we assert sovereignty? What does it mean?" Sovereignty just means being who we are. Exercising the rights that we talk about, taking the rights back and using and doing the things that we say that makes us aboriginal. That's exercising sovereignty. Going back onto our lands. Taking the kids out of school. That's exercising sovereignty. You are a sovereign people by doing that. Nobody gives you sovereignty. You have to exercise your sovereign rights. And what we've got here in terms of coming to the climax *(unknown word) of this conference, Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs I really give thanks to this initiative, because it's really something that I think has inspired a lot of us. And a lot of people have attended here, and as an initiative of the Union of B.C., I'd really like to thank you very much because you *(unknown word) a wonderful achievement to get to where we are now. And just in closing my comments, just one action. I believe that the thing that makes us so defenseless as indigenous people, whether it be in Australia, whether it be in B.C., or whether it be in Peru or the Amazon, is the fact that we don't have the financial and manpower to be able to, the financial resources, to be able to combat the enemy. And it's, we all try to steal, scrape, grab *(unknown word) whatever little dollars we can to get around to such things like this here *(unknown word) , and the Union of B.C. has assisted me to get here, and I thank them very much for that. But, getting here now I think

it's time now that what we need to do is develop a new world order, and that is aboriginal. We need to get onto the international scene, instead of *(unknown word) , *(unknown word) .

MODERATOR DIAZ

I wish only to repeat that I think the *(unknown word) exercise is that you *(unknown word) brothers and sisters that are here, your comments and your proposals, so that whoever agrees or disagrees that has a chance to speak up. But that we are insisting, I apologize for insisting a little bit on this, that you if you have a suggestion for improving the text that you should put it into your copy of the text, so that the working group that will be dealing with that, will be again a collective effort, can fully take into account what you are suggesting. Thank-you very much.

PRESENTER FIVE

My name's *(unknown word) from the Okanagan Nation. There's a lot of elders and knowledgeable people, and I'd just like to thank them for holding our rights, and for keeping our language and our culture and our ways. The only thing that I would like to add, or I'd like to see added, is that we have collective rights. And to me, I mentioned this in the other forum at the other building, that just about everything looks like it's dealing with individual rights, and I would just like to add that we have collective rights as a Nation. So, I would just like to have that worded in there somehow.

MODERATOR'S ASSISTANT

More explicit statement that it's a collective *(unknown word) , that these are held in collective rather than individual peoples' knowledge or ownership over it.

PRESENTER SIX

My friends, my name is *(unknown word) Dene *(unknown word) . I'm from Fort Nelson, B.C., which I said earlier was the part of Dene-Da *(unknown word) which is now within the provincial boundaries of B.C.. The white people call us Slavey *(unknown word) Indians, and one thing I want to bring forth is that I feel that what's kept us sovereign is our spirit. There should be some mention in this declaration that our rights, our ties to the land, our spiritual nature that can't be defined. But I also want to say that First Nations throughout the world have been very pragmatic in using what would be useful to continue their lineage, and continue their survival. And I think we can see that today, here in this university where I went to school. I went to school here some years ago where I got a degree in forestry, and I found it really difficult to maintain ties with my Dene background, because it was so overpowering from the white man's point-of-view. But I want to encourage our youth who are going into colleges and into universities to keep going, we need you there. Don't give up and don't feel ashamed if you don't know all the words yet, because when I was going to school here I didn't know all the words in Dene either. But as I'm getting on in years, there's words in our language it can only be used to describe a certain situation, a certain feeling, and we don't have these words in English. So, I just want to see somewhere in this text that we use the English language, and we use this gee-whiz technology, like those fancy doo-dads on the screen we see, let's use those. Those are tools. It's like a holder, you can hold potatoes. And that's all it is. It's just a tool, it's not something we put on a pedestal and try to be like. We can use it like we use a *(unknown word) to push our boats through the water. And I think it's important to know that. You know I'm in the southern part of the province now, I'm working in the Okanagan territory, and you people there have made me welcome even though I'm from way-away. And I appreciate the opportunity to be here, to learn wisdom from others here. And as we all go home on our own trails, I pray that we all have safe journeys home and back to our loved ones. *(unknown word)

MODERATOR'S ASSISTANT

At this point I'd like to invite, unless Senor Diaz has anything else to add?

MODERATOR DIAZ

I think people who have suggestion, *(unknown word) suggestions, will submit their paper so that we can implement those changes once they have been discussed collectively. Because it's not something that I'm going to revise, it is going to be given to a working group who collectively will decide what to do, and then submit it to you to see whether the gist of what you were proposing was taken into account. Do we understand that you want the floor? Yes, please.

MODERATOR'S ASSISTANT

One more intervention. Last minute.

PRESENTER SEVEN

Hello my relations, all my relations. In support of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs and *(unknown word) here, I would like to emphasize that the traditional knowledge that was attacked by the B.C. and federal government, by the domestic government. Used ammunition and it's a globally-renowned disgrace of domestic governments' at the 100-Mile House each *(unknown word) , and the Sundance Chiefs are from South Dakota in the area promoting, with our invitation, a review commission on the provincial and federal government's attack on the traditional life. The Sundance which was in siege two years ago in B.C.. I think it's crucial to point this out in this session because the indigenous peoples were attacked by ammunition, forced by the provincial and federal government. I would also like to assert information for the declaration of indigenous peoples which this one page looks to be a part of the draft declaration, if this convention with the permission of honour *(unknown word) of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs ambition *(unknown word) here. I am part of the International Indian Treaty Council, and there are seven international indigenous peoples, three which intervened at 100-Mile House. I would submit an appeal to this convention to support the B.C. Indian Chiefs to invite the indigenous non-government organizations to the province at crisis, at urgent expedience, for this to support a review commission on the attack of all indigenous people in the world over in regard to this siege at 100-Mile House, with the government attacking the Sundance. And although we are doing the traditional aspects now for the last two months, and we'll pursue a review commission targeting a grievance against the colonial government, we did charge the country in Canada at the United Nations in 1988 for violation of every treaty in the country. And in regard for the platform for yesterday and today, in regard to the treaty and non-treaty at this table, I would submit an appeal that we support the B.C. Indian Chiefs to have all of the indigenous non-government organizations present in B.C. to specifically this field of protection of traditional knowledge, where we're at the federal government in parliamentary process for grievancing, and we will in turn *(unknown word) /attempt *(unknown word) at the United Nations at this Human Rights Sub-Commission to denounce the colonial government of Canada in domestic for using the ammunition against the traditional knowledge, specifically the Sundance. In the spirit of honour, I thank all for your time, because for me and I believe with the support of the elders that are representatives, without hesitation I wouldn't offer any or condemn anyone to think that we're not supportive in the global community, we are supported as indigenous peoples. And I would like to create, help create that platform for the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs to be supported in *(unknown word) in support of one of the international instruments, organizations that have a voice, or support of your endeavors here. If we could support the indigenous peoples at the U.N. by supporting in this case your text here, in addition to support the draft declaration by the indigenous people, which means to further our process since 1977 at the U.N. to create a voice for the indigenous peoples of the world at the United Nations. *(unknown word) In the spirit of your honour, thank-you for your time.

MODERATOR'S ASSISTANT

I should just mention that it is now five o'clock. There is actually some time. If people are compelled to say something or want to say something, it just looks like, not to say anything against the audience here, but there's a lot of tired people who have been here for three days working and talking and listening, and if there are no other questions, then before we go any further I'll just thank Senor Diaz and present him with a *(unknown word) . And at this time, I'd like to invite up Joan and Stewart Philip and the elder who is going to be doing the closing prayers, Flora Dawson. Just to let you all know who Flora is, she's from the Kwagwiltz *(unknown word) Nation from Kingcome Inlet. And I'm very proud to say that she was one of the first people in British Columbia to get their teaching certificate and to be trained as a teacher, first native people in British Columbia. And on behalf of, it's been said a couple times already, but on behalf of all the participants and everybody else, we just wanted to thank the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs for all the good work and the hard work that went into it, all the volunteers, all the speakers, and everybody involved in it. I haven't had a chance to be here for the whole time myself, but I can tell all the good energy that's been coming out of this, and the good thoughts, and I'm really sorry that I wasn't here the whole time. And I just look forward to the follow-up and the action, and everything else that comes out of all the good that's been experienced here in the last couple of days.

PRESENTER EIGHT

I'd like to just wish everybody greetings, and say thank you. *(unknown word) to the U.B.C.I.C., to the Interior Alliance, for really putting a lot of good effort into something that was really needed. I'm really proud to say that I was a part of this gathering because of all the knowledge and all the traditions and the culture that brought everybody together. It's all a part of our hearts, the reason why we are here. To hear the languages, to hear the songs, just to hear the prayers. A comment I'd like to say is that I made a comment yesterday about the treaty, because it meant a lot to me. And I don't want to take anything away from what I said, but I'd like to just share that it's important that we be careful not to extinguish our cultures or our languages or anything that means *(unknown word) , being a part of the land. You here a lot of comments about "Treaty-this" or "Treaty-that," and in the same breath "What are we going to do about it, all in the name of unity. What can we do together?" We're all here together. There's people who are part of treaty, and there's people that aren't a part of treaty that are here today. When you start talking the language and the cultures, we're standing today together because it really means a lot to us that we hold on to it and not lose it. But, what are we going to do together, in the name of unity? I'd just like to share that because I know there was a bit of hard feelings yesterday, because of strong statements that were stated, I'd just like to share that I'm willing to stand with you if we could just get together and start to strategize on what we are going to do about the bands that want to get out of treaty. Millions of dollars are there, and these people have to pay back in one way or another. So I'd just like to thank everybody for coming here, and thank the Union and the Interior Alliance for putting your work together and inviting the people internationally around the world to come together, so that we can work together, stand together. *(unknown word)

PRESENTER NINE

I just first wanted to make a comment with respect to Chief Terry's remarks. To those people that are involved in the treaty process and that do have large debts, believe me the money that you are loaned was made stolen, made off of our stolen property. So, you owe nothing. I just want to thank the Union for putting together this very impressive conference. I want to thank my Coast Salish relatives for allowing us the opportunity to be here. I was really impressed with the caliber of the presenters, but more importantly I was impressed with the caliber of the participation and the intelligent questions and recommendations that have come out of this conference. I've realized through this conference that we have to work at absolutely every level: at the family level, community, nation, international levels, in order to assert our right to self-determination. Most importantly, and I said this yesterday, we have to revive those relationships that we have

among ourselves in order to give each other strength and to strategize about what we're going to do about where we're at. And I really believe that there's a genius in the collective. One of the elders said yesterday that we have to establish an organization parallel to the United Nations, only among ourselves as indigenous peoples. The other thing that I feel is absolutely necessary is that there has to be mechanisms of or strategies around how we're going to make ourselves accountable to our people, because the other complaint I've heard here is that people at the grassroots level aren't informed, don't know what's going on. And, we don't know who is speaking for these international levels so I think we need to strategize about that. I feel that this conference is just a new beginning for us, working together again to resolve the issues and the problems that we all face together. *(unknown word)

PRESENTER TEN

*(unknown word) I would like to begin once again by paying our respects to the Musqueam people for allowing us to have this wonderful opportunity to get together on their territory. I would like to personally thank Leigh Ogstan and her staff for organizing this conference. As I mentioned during the opening ceremonies, it took a tremendous amount of work to organize the conference, prepare the kits, make travel arrangements, and so on and so forth. I think the returns on that work are going to be monumental. As some of you know, we held a conference similar in nature to this last year, but on a much smaller scale in terms of the scope. It was basically a regional conference, although we did have people from across Canada. It seems very, very evident as a result of this conference that there is a very critical need to build unity within the province of British Columbia. I think we need to make a very sincere commitment to work together irregardless of what organization we're with, irregardless of whether we are inside or outside of the so-called "B.C. treaty process." I think we need to understand that the enemy is not ourselves or other indigenous parties, that in fact the enemy is the state governments that are tireless and relentless in their efforts to extinguish us as indigenous peoples. To dismantle our cultures, to eradicate our languages, and to absorb us into their own societies. That's been the whole purpose and objective of colonization, and it continues today. I think we need to understand and accept the truth of this. Denial serves no purpose. It only prevents us from coming together to deal with the problem. So I think that when I look back on our home community, and as an indigenous father, an indigenous grandfather, I realize that there is a need for that unity, to promote that unity on a national scale here within Canada. There's a need to build coalitions. That work is happening, we are working with people, the Miqk'maq *(unknown word) people, the Algonquins *(unknown word) . We don't have to restrict our efforts within Assembly of First Nations; those coalitions can be nailed *(unknown word) both within and without the Assembly of First Nations. On an international scale it's obvious that we need to continue with these conferences. There was just a vast wealth of information and experiences that were exchanged in these few short days that we were together. I look forward to the day when I look around this room and I see people from other countries and that they become very, very familiar faces to us, and that we begin to know each other on a more personal level, and begin to work together on a more regular basis. So, closing this conference I feel a much stronger sense of hope. I always relate everything back to our children and grandchildren, because it's the future of those human beings that I guess I carry with me. We not only carry our ancestors with us, we have the responsibility for our future generations that we also carry. We have to be very, very mindful of the things that we do, of the agreements that we enter into. I greatly appreciated the remarks that were made by people with very strong hearts. I appreciated the honesty of those remarks, but at the same time those of you with gentle hearts you need to know that you're not alone. As far as indigenous people are concerned, there's several million of us throughout the world and we can work together and help each other. That's what we need to do if we are sincere about the children and grandchildren that we left at home. So you have greatly honoured and enriched us with your presence. This success of this conference is directly attributable to those of you who came out to support it, and I really look forward to the next time that we can get together and exchange our stories, our concerns. *(unknown word)

PRESENTER ELEVEN

*(unknown word) Just asking our creator's blessing upon us here at this very important gathering, and especially those who have come so far way. Our brothers and sisters from around the world, indigenous peoples like us who are also striving and fighting to find a way. And our thanks to the Musqueam people for inviting us into their territory. And that when we go home, that we remember that we take these *(unknown word) messages to our people so that we can relate what is happening here and then we will include everybody and not forget. I'm just going to sing a little sort of a blessing here. *(unknown word) Just asking our creator to remember us all, and a safe journey to all the places we are all returning to. And thank-you to this young couple *(unknown word) who has made a very strong effort for the Union *(unknown word) , Stewart and Joan. And bless us all, and feel strength that we will renew our strength after this wonderful convention. And thank-you all, amen.

PRESENTER TWELVE

Before people leave, I'd like to sing an honour song before everybody leaves. The song is a national song, it's a song that was born on the north American Indian Movement. It's an AIM song. Just to honour everybody for all the work that you're doing internationally, and that everybody take care and have a safe trip home.

HONOUR SONG