

August 15, 2010

Dear President Obama,

State College Friends Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) supports the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Having worked with American Indian leaders since the time of William Penn, Quakers are deeply aware of the significance of this groundbreaking document.

In 2007, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed the Declaration by a vote of 144 to 4. To our deep regret, our country was one of the four that opposed passage. Since then, Australia (2009) and New Zealand (2010) have reversed their positions and endorsed the Declaration. We thank you for sending Ambassador Susan Rice to the April 2010 meetings of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples, and for now conducting a fresh review of the Declaration's provisions.

It took 25 long years for the international community to reach agreement on the wording of the Declaration. During the final stages of this work, some countries retained concerns. Yet, working together, representatives of the nations of the world overcame challenges of definitions and of implications for countries with numerous indigenous peoples. Since these issues and questions have been thoroughly examined, the United States should have little hesitation in supporting the Declaration.

While it is not binding in law, the Declaration represents the highest moral standard for the treatment of the world's estimated 370 million indigenous peoples. This Declaration is written in a human rights framework that will guide government policies for indigenous communities and promote the participation of indigenous peoples in the political processes and decisions that affect them.

It is time for the United States to seize the high moral ground of endorsing the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We request that you take the necessary steps to accomplish this now-overdue American witness for human rights.

Sincerely,

Gary Fosmire, Clerk

State College Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (