NGO Committee on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

October 21, 2021 1pm-3pm

**Indigenous.committee@gmail.com**

**Facebook: ngo committee on the rights of indigenous peoples**

**Participants**

1. Daniel Leblanc
2. Elaine Congress
3. Sandra Sheridan
4. Cici Ogden
5. Sr. Petite Lao
6. Henry Proclade
7. Mathew Giblin
8. Joseph Wronka
9. Myrna Coffino
10. Judy Alves
11. Marilyn Winter
12. Nancy Rhodes
13. Sue Jacobs
14. Rashmi Jaipal
15. Casey Chu
16. Rick Chavolla
17. Sharon Joslyn
18. Angela Sabblah
19. Carolyn DiCarlo
20. Rafael LaTorre

**1. Moment of Silence in Honor of the Land we are on and the Native Peoples of this land.**

**2. Welcome and Introductions**

**3. Review of Agenda**

**4. Meeting Minutes of September 16, 2021** - Approved

**5. Executive Committee Report** - the Executive Committee met on Sunday, October 4. They wrote a letter to Pope Francis and a letter to U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland. It was requested that the letters be read aloud for the members to hear. They also spoke about Indigenous Peoples’ Day and the issue of the Columbus statues in New York City, especially Columbus Circle. ***Daniel*** - read the letter to Pope Francis, which is asking that the Doctrine of Discovery be officially removed from papal doctrine, all references to it eliminated, and for a formal apology issued. The doctrine was written by Pope Alexander II after Europeans came to the Americas, declaring the land free for Europeans to claim. The doctrine has been used to rule against Natives in court cases with the United States Government, so it is important that it be removed. They are also asking that the Pope include Indigenous people in the crafting of the apology.

***Judy*** - there should be no issue with an apology as Pope Francis and previous popes have spoken out against the doctrine and in support of self-determination for indigenous populations.

***Rashmi*** - asked for a copy of the letter

***Daniel*** - the letter will be sent out to the members, and posted on the committee website once it is up and running

***Sandra*** - read the letter from the council to Deb Haaland, who is the Secretary of the Interior and the first Native American to serve as a cabinet secretary. Since her appointment she has launched several initiatives to further the rights of indigenous peoples. The letter congratulates her on her appointment, provides her with the history of the committee, and invites her to join a meeting if she wishes.

**6. Discussion of activities for Indigenous Peoples’ Day in New York City - Rick Chavolla**

Roberto, the committee chair, was supposed to share on this topic, but he was unable to attend the meeting so Rick spoke instead.

Indigenous Peoples’ Day is an annual event, held on the same day as the federal holiday Columbus Day. There was a powwow on Randall’s Island along with many events across the city. There is an ongoing push to get New York City to officially recognize Indigenous Peoples’ Day, we are behind most of the country in that we don’t officially recognize it. He recommends letter writing and other continuing forms of advocacy in order to help get the holiday officially recognized. Finally, he cites an issue with naming one day as Indigenous Peoples’ Day, as it lets people think they can ignore their issues for the rest of the year.

In this same vein, November is Native American Heritage Month, so advocacy efforts should continue. There is currently a big push to change the name of Columbus Circle, and have the statue removed. He reiterated the importance of the removal of the Doctrine of Discovery, and notes that activists have previously traveled to the Vatican to ask that any mention of it be erased.

**7. Issues outside the United States and the FOREST Act - Daniel LeBlanc**

It is important for the committee to remember that we are a global organization and need to focus on issues outside of the United States. In Paraguay the government has illegally removed ten tribes and jailed their leaders in order to cede their land to corporations. The committee is working with constitutional lawyers to force the government of Paraguay to follow their own laws, which prohibit the removal of indigenous peoples from their tribal lands.

The committee will also be sending draft letters to the members, which can be personalized and sent to our congress people, urging them to pass the Forest Act. The Forest Act is a proposed bill that would prevent deforestation in the production of consumer goods through a variety of measures, including banning goods farmed on illegally deforested land from entering the United States and increasing overall supply chain transparency. The goal is to send the letters before the end of the month, as the committee suspects that the bill will be killed quickly.

***Elaine*** - President Biden has been on target with preserving indigenous lands in the Western United States

***Rashmi*** - asks if UNEP has been contacted, and wonders if they would be a good ally in dealing with the issues in Paraguay.

***Daniel*** - UNEP has been contacted and we are also working with the human rights representative for Indigenous Peoples

**8. Updates from the Health Subcommittee - Rashmi Jaipal and Sue Jacobs**

***Rashmi*** - shared the committee's discussion of applying a bill on the right to mental health specifically to Indigenous populations. There is talk of starting a separate subcommittee to focus on this advocacy, potentially led by Joseph Wronka.

***Sue*** - there are specific health issues that impact indigenous women, because of the traumas they experience in their lifetimes. She asked that the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women be discussed in the main committee meeting.

***Carolyn*** - working with a doctor who is developing an app that connects alternative health providers, and wants to see if it can be used to link Indigenous healers.

***Rick*** - any conversation on indigenous women should center on the first trauma of colonization, which suppressed many matriarchal societies. The colonizers were deeply patriarchal, and they forced their values onto native power structures, which often were not patriarchal. Many nations are working towards rematriation, reclaiming the matriarchal origins of their systems and knowledge. He also gives the name of a native social worker he knows and suggests that she work with the health subcommittee.

***Rashmi*** - could the main committee do a panel on the trauma of patriarchal colonization in matriarchal societies?

***Elaine*** - this could work as a parallel event with the CSW

***Rick*** - rematriation is currently the biggest movement in circles of indigenous activists

***Elaine*** - this idea fits well with the current CSW and Fordham Institute of Women’s themes of women leaders

***Nancy*** - in the Seneca Falls women’s convention, the suffragettes were taught about their rights and power by indigenous women. Both white and native women are oppressed by European patriarchy, recommends the book “Misogyny: the World’s Oldest Prejudice.”

***Sue*** - the trauma of patriarchal colonization impacts men and two-spirit people as well

***Rick*** - the suppression of matriarchy hurts everyone. Many of the suffragettes did not show enough thanks to their native teachers, but one who did was Matilda Josslyn Gage

***Rashmi*** - excited about the movement of rematriation, they had a speaker a few years ago who spoke about this. Wants to start a side event with the CSW, or else start a gender subcommittee

***Elaine*** - SDG 17 is about partnerships, so a side or parallel event with the CSW would be great

***Daniel*** - asks that we take up the issue in the health subcommittee and bring a concrete proposal to the next main members meeting

**9. Work in Colombia with Indigenous Peoples - Rafael Latorre**

He is working in Colombia to legalize the growing of cannabis and coca leaves on native lands. This would allow the native people to work and farm independently, and produce these plants for pharmaceutical and other industrial purposes.

**10. Other Items & Announcements**

***Sandra*** - how can we refer to Columbus Circle without having to use Columbus’s name?

***Elaine*** - in writing she usually puts Columbus / Indigenous Circle

***Rashmi*** - wonders about the committees interactions with the Italian community

***Daniel*** - there has been some interaction between the committee and the Italian community in New York City. Some people are willing to admit that Columbus wasn’t actually Italian, but many have claimed him as a symbol of their right to be in this country. The community struck down a city council initiative to remove the statues in Columbus Circle, but the council members will be changing soon and the committee plans to try and get it passed again. The question of how we can ally with the Italian community is an important one.

***Elaine*** - Columbus Day is a national holiday, but some states only recognize Indigenous Peoples’ Day

***Sue*** - in Oklahoma they only recognize Indigenous Peoples’ Day, because so many residents of Oklahoma belong to sovereign nations

***Rashmi*** - education is important before we push for big changes, because most people don’t know the reality of who Columbus was and the things he did. The issue of Columbus Day has become so polarized among people who don’t even know what he did.

***Daniel*** - there has actually been a concerted effort to make sure people don’t know

***Nancy*** - agrees with Rashmi. Pushing to change a name without educating people as to why only furthers the division. The truth has not been told in so many ways and places, so even in the smallest situations we have the chance to educate people. Women and girls around the globe have suffered trauma in cultures throughout history. We are a family of human beings.

***Rashmi*** - proposes that we write a letter asking the city council to place a historical plaque next to the statue of Columbus explaining what he did. Without education, movements such as those against Columbus can come across as unreasonable.

***Daniel*** - we should speak to Roberto first, as he was involved in the original city council effort to change the name and remove the statue. Biden hasn’t changed any laws, but he did say that he was celebrating the day as Indigenous Peoples’ Day.

***Elaine*** - the time is right for change. Maybe we can take this local idea and scale it up to a national level.

***Rashmi*** - we need to teach the true history of contact

***Sue*** - it is really important to recognize that everything didn’t start in New York. We need to look at the issue nationally and internationally. Thanksgiving is also an issue. She recognizes the complicated history of the day by first leaving out food for her ancestors before eating her own meal. It is also important that we continue to tackle the issue of native “mascots”.

***Elaine*** - perhaps we should start a new subcommittee for education and advocacy

***Daniel*** - this is a good idea and it should be discussed in the next executive committee meeting. Asks those who have not yet spoken if they have any questions / comments / suggestions. Also asks people to turn their cameras back on, as many people had turned them off.

***Mathew*** - maybe bring up the fact that the Pope is Jesuit in their letter. Can’t speak to current education because he’s so far removed from his K-12 education, and also doesn’t know how we can educate people within the binary views that are common surrounding Columbus. Also unsure of how to separate Italian identity and Columbus

***Petite*** - a group from Canada will be meeting with the Pope as part of their 94 calls to action. Canada now has an annual Day of Truth and Reconciliation.

***Daniel*** - remember that the news isn’t a good source for everything happening in Canada

***Rashmi*** - change is a process because you don’t want to psychologically harm those on the other side or make them feel bad because of who they are. An educational, sympathetic approach to change is a psychological approach.

***Elaine*** - we need to do a lot of research about what is actually being taught

***Cici*** - I’m happy to share what I was taught in school, even though it was a bit ago

***Sue*** - education is important but we also have to look at ourselves. We know the truth so we have to have the difficult conversations and facilitate the dialogues. There are some states where things are so bad that critical race theory can’t be taught in schools, or teachers can be fired for not calling the holiday Columbus Day.

***Daniel*** - all of these issues will be covered under the discussion of the new subcommittee during the next executive committee meeting. The agenda has a link to an important facts sheet. The next meeting will be November 18th.