

U.S. Urged to Give Sacred Land Back to Native Americans

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Mount Rushmore is a popular tourist attraction with 60-foot-tall faces of four former presidents—George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln—carved into the granite stone in South Dakota’s Black Hills, which the Sioux tribes consider to be sacred and to which they have territorial claims based on an 1868 treaty. ‘It should have never been taken, nor should have been made a national monument with four presidents that fostered nothing but hatred and contempt towards Native people.’ — Jay Winter Nightwolf, host of the “American Indian Truths”

WASHINGTON (FinalCall.com) – A United Nations human rights official has urged the United States to return the control of lands considered sacred to Native Americans, including the site of the Mount Rushmore National Memorial.

James Anaya, the UN special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, unveiled his recommendations in Geneva May 11 after completing a 12-day visit to the U.S. where he met with representatives of indigenous peoples in six states.

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“It should have never been taken, nor should have been made a national monument with four presidents that fostered nothing but hatred and contempt towards Native people,” Jay Winter Nightwolf, host of the “American Indian Truths” radio program on Pacifica Radio’s WPFW-FM in Washington, DC told The Final Call. “The only people that should be up there are Geronimo, Crazy Horse and Chief Sitting Bull. Those are our Founding Fathers.”

Mr. Anaya also met members of the Obama administration and briefed the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, but no member of the House of Representatives agreed to meet with him. “I have heard stories that make evident the profound hurt that indigenous peoples continue to feel because of the history of oppression they have faced,” Mr. Anaya said in a

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statement.

For more than a century, he said, the U.S. government seized lands and resources from Native Americans, removed children from their families and communities, caused the loss of languages, broke treaties with tribes and oppressed the indigenous peoples on the grounds of racial discrimination. “The sense of loss, alienation and indignity is pervasive throughout Indian Country,” Mr Anaya said.

His findings will be included in a final, non-binding report submitted to the UN Human Rights Council in September. They constitute the first-ever investigation into the rights of indigenous peoples in the U.S.

He welcomed the fact that the U.S. did reverse a previous decision in 2010, endorsing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, but he said, more must be done. He is not alone on that point.

“But as they do things here in America, they need to really make it good,” Mr. Nightwolf said. “They need to change all that. They should return our other Holy Land, which is the Black Hills. They offered us money. We refused the money. We don’t want the money. Those places are sacred to us. They are part of our spiritual experience with the Creator.”

Mr. Anaya said returning the land would be a step toward addressing systemic discrimination against Native Americans that continues to this day. “The indigenous peoples of this country ... suffer from poverty, poor health conditions, lack of attainment of formal education (and) social ills at rates that far exceed those of other segments of the American population. These conditions are related to a history of wrongs that they have suffered.”

Shortly after the 1868 treaty was signed concerning the Black Hills, gold was discovered in the region, and the U.S. Congress eventually passed a law taking over the land. In 1980, the Supreme Court ruled that the land was seized illegally and ordered the government to pay

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compensation. The Sioux, however, rejected the money, calling for the return of the now public lands.

“I’m talking about restoring to indigenous peoples what obviously they’re entitled to and they have a legitimate claim to in a way that is not divisive but restorative,” Mr. Anaya said.

“What I found are vibrant communities, indigenous communities throughout the country that are striving to survive as distinct peoples with their cultures intact, transmit those cultures to future generations, but they face a number of challenges,” Mr. Anaya told Pacifica Radio’s “Democracy Now!”

“The indigenous peoples of this country—the Native Americans, American Indians, Alaskan natives, native Hawaiians—suffer from poverty, poor health conditions, lack of attainment of formal education, social ills, at rates far that—that far exceed those of other segments of the American population. And these conditions are related to a history of wrongs that they have suffered that most Americans are familiar with,” he said.

The UN official visited one Oglala Sioux reservation where the per capita income hovers around \$7,000 a year, less than one sixth of the national average. There, life expectancy stands at about 50 years, according to the Guardian.

Mr. Anaya also said indigenous peoples feel they have too little control over geographic regions considered sacred to them, like the San Francisco Peaks in Arizona as well as the Black Hills in South Dakota. Such lands are places where mining for natural resources, including uranium, has caused serious health problems among native peoples, who are suffering the after effects of water contamination.

In April, the U.S. Justice Department announced that the government had agreed to pay more than id="mce_marker" billion to 40 Native American tribes to settle lawsuits over the use of tribal lands that were held in trust by the federal government, but exploited by private

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companies for timber, mining and farming.

The U.S. is home to 2.7 million Native Americans, nearly half of them living on 310 reservations. Some tribes have prospered operating gambling casinos, but others are well below national averages for income and health.{jcomments on}