



United Nations Human Rights Experts call on the United States to Respect the Rights of Indigenous Peoples



July 3rd 2020 protest at Mt. Rushmore, SD. Behind the banner, Nick Tilsen is 3rd from right. Photo: Willi White, NDN Collective

Rapid City, South Dakota: On December 15th, 2020, United Nations Special Rapporteurs on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, and in the Field of Cultural Rights issued a joint statement expressing concern about the criminal charges and continuing intimidation of human, land, and Treaty Rights defender Nicolas Tilsen. Mr. Tilsen and other defenders were arrested during a peaceful protest organized by the NDN Collective and others in opposition to a campaign rally organized by United States President Trump and the governor of South Dakota without the consent of the Indigenous Treaty Nations as mandated in the 1868 Ft. Laramie Treaty. The Trump campaign rally took place on Oceti Sakowin (aka "Great Sioux Nation") Treaty Territory at a sacred site now known as the Mt. Rushmore National Monument.

Tribal leaders and community members also expressed their concerns regarding the potential for increased exposure of their Nations to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Trump rally was attended by thousands of participants with no enforcement of safety precautions, masks, or social distancing.

Mr. Tilsen, a member of the Oglala Lakota Nation, is facing state felony charges which could result in up to 17 years in prison if he is convicted. His next court date is December 18th, 2020.

The original urgent action communications to the United Nation's Human Rights Rapporteurs on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Human Rights Defenders addressing this urgent matter of Treaty and Cultural Rights Violations, as well as the repression of Indigenous Human Rights Defenders, was filed by the International Indian Treaty Council, the Black Hills Sioux Nation Council, and the Sicangu Treaty Council on July 11th, 2020.

An additional submission was filed by the IITC and the LNC addressing the specific matter of Mr. Tilsen's situation on September 25th.

The IITC greatly appreciates the commitment of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Mr. Jose Francisco Cali Tzay, Mayan Kaqchikel from Guatemala, to address the rights of Indigenous Peoples to the recognition, observance, and enforcement of their Treaties as affirmed in article 37 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. William A. Means, IITC Board member and representative of the Black Hills Sioux Nation Council of the Oglala Lakota Nation, also expressed his appreciation for the response of the UN Rapporteurs including their call for US Authorities "to initiate dialogue with the Great Sioux Nation for the Resolution of Treaty Violations". He confirmed that "the establishment of a Nation-to-Nation process to ensure that our Treaty rights are upheld and violations are resolved has been a long-standing call by the Oceti Sakowin".

Nick Tilsen, President of the NDN Collective based in Rapid City, South Dakota also expressed appreciation for the support of the United Nation Human Rights mandate-holders in his Nation's ongoing struggle to defend their lands and Treaty Rights. "We continue in this struggle for our ancestral land in the sacred Black Hills that the generations before us have fought for, and we will continue standing up to the systems of white supremacy and for Indigenous rights," he said. "We're being criminalized for our inherent right and responsibility to protect these lands."

To see the United Nations press release in full <http://bit.ly/2WIKXEn>

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To follow the work of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/SRIndigenousPeoples/Pages/SRIPeoplesIndex.aspx>