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A N T H R O P O L O G I C A L
A S S O C I A T I O N

February 2, 2009

President Barack Hussein Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C.

Dear President Obama:

I am writing on behalf of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) – a professional organization of over 11,000 anthropologists committed to the promotion and protection of the right of people everywhere to the full realization of their humanity – to seek your administration's endorsement of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

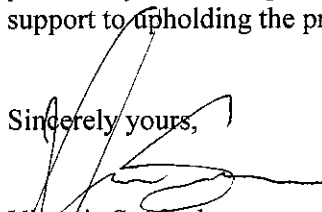
The world's 370 million indigenous people – including First Americans living in the United States – are among the poorest, most marginalized, and most exploited people on our planet. Because they speak different languages, have different cultures, and live in remote locales that are among the only remaining sources of untapped natural resources, indigenous peoples today face the same pressures that their ancestors faced in earlier times. These include ethnic cleansing, forced relocation, and forced assimilation.

On September 13, 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration is based on core international principles and values that embrace tolerance, peace, and respect for the dignity of all cultures and peoples. In particular, the Declaration is described as a "standard of achievement to be pursued in a spirit of partnership and mutual respect."

Over 25 years in the drafting, this global human rights instrument was adopted with just four "no" votes. Embarrassingly, the United States was one of those four countries. The Declaration does not bestow on indigenous peoples any new or special human rights. Rather it provides a contextualized elaboration of generally accepted human right norms already present in international conventions to which the United States is a party as they relate to the specific historical, cultural, and social circumstances of indigenous peoples. The standards affirmed in the Declaration seek to redress the systemic obstacles and discrimination that indigenous peoples have faced in the enjoyment of their rights, including their collective rights as peoples. By embracing the Declaration, the United States will regain and strengthen its credibility as a global leader while taking an important step towards implementing the platform on America's First Peoples that appears on your campaign website.

Across the country and around the globe, indigenous peoples are celebrating the promise your administration holds for a brighter future. On behalf of the American Anthropological Association, I urge you to fulfill that promise by renouncing the United States' General Assembly "no" vote on the Declaration, and pledging your support to upholding the principles recognized therein.

Sincerely yours,



Victoria Sanford
AAA Committee for Human Rights, Chair