

UNITED NATIONS

COMMENTS OF THE WESTERN SHOSHONE NATIONAL COUNCIL
AT THE TWELFTH SESSION OF THE
WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS
REGARDING AGENDA ITEM 5

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I offer this statement as part of the review of developments since the last session of the working group.

While the Working Group on Indigenous Populations is meeting, another urgent meeting is taking place. Delegates are meeting nearby at the Conference on Disarmament, in an effort to achieve a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban. I cannot stress enough the importance of this conference to the Western Shoshone Government, Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples around the world. The future well being of the world hangs in the balance on the outcome of these meetings.

Most of the states which are developing nuclear technology and weapons of mass destruction, have chosen the territories of Indigenous peoples to carry out these activities. Our very lives are being destroyed by the 926 nuclear weapons tests of the United States and United Kingdom. All of these have been conducted on Western Shoshone land! We cannot take any more!

Fallout and radioactive contamination from bombs detonated by the US and the United Kingdom have been killing our people, and contaminating our land. The pain and sorrow we feel by the killing of our Earth Mother cannot fully be expressed. We are human beings. We breath air, we drink water, we harvest crops and animals. These are the very things which are being destroyed by the nuclear age. And it is these very things which are our birth right, and the birth right of our children.

Further, under the terms of the Treaty of Ruby Valley, clearly, no grant of rights to conduct nuclear activities was ever contemplated in 1863, or at any other time granted to the US or UK. The activities of the US Department of Energy in this case seriously violates the treaty. There is

no clearer example of the abuse of human rights than, the use of nuclear weapons of one people against another.

Finally, the US proposes to develop Yucca Mountain on Western Shoshone Territory for the permanent storage of high level spent nuclear fuel from commercial nuclear reactors. This new project adds further risk to the destruction of our people and lands.

For both the permanent spent nuclear fuel storage facility and the nuclear weapons testing project, cultural investigations are conducted by the US Department of Energy. Our cultural sites, from birth to burial are being investigated. Because the US feels it must develop its nuclear technology within our territory, our cultural sites will be destroyed. But not without first being identified. The process of identification has lead the scientists under US government contract to carry out the investigation to create a new process for dealing with the eventual destruction of our culture. They call this process, cultural triage. The technical research definition is:

...a forced choice situation in which an ethnic group is faced with the decision to rank in importance equally valued cultural resources that could be affected by a proposed development.

We cannot expect to continue to live as a Shoshone people if these activities of the United States and the United Kingdom continue. And, I submit an alternative term for this process to systematically destroy our culture. And this is GENOCIDE.

I thank the chair.

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