

Solemn Declaration

World Council of Indigenous Peoples

We, the Indigenous Peoples of the world,
united in this corner of
our Mother the Earth,
in a great assembly of men of wisdom
declare to all nations:

We glory in our proud past:
when the earth was our nurturing mother,
when the night sky formed our common roof,
when Sun and Moon were our parents,
when all were brothers and sisters,
when our great civilizations
grew under the Sun,
when our chiefs and elders
were great leaders,
when justice ruled the Law
and its execution.

Then other people arrived:
thirsting for blood, for gold,
for land and its wealth,
carrying the cross and the sword,
one in each hand,
without knowing or waiting
to learn the ways of our worlds,
they considered us
to be lower than the animals,
they stole our lands from us
and took our lands,
they made slaves of the Sons of the Sun.

However, they have never
been able to eliminate us,
nor to erase the memories of what we were,
because we are
the culture of the earth and the sky,
we are the ancient descent
and we are the millions,
and although our whole universe
may be ravaged,
our People will live on for longer
than even the kingdom of death.

Now, we come from
the four corners of the earth,
we protest before the concert of nations that:
We are the Indigenous Peoples,
we are a People with a consciousness
of culture and race,
on the edge of each country's borders and
marginal to each country's citizenship.

And rising up after centuries of oppression,
evoking the memory
of our indigenous martyrs,
and in homage to
the counsel of our wise elders:

We vow to control again our own destiny
and recover our complete humanity
and pride in being
Indigenous peoples.



Drawing:
Nils-Aslak Valkeapää

WHEN ALL WERE BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Ham Muus

"Muus from Snåsa? Muus... from Snåsa?" The questions were alive with the recognition of my name and the place where my ancestors came from. Did this vibrant and colorfully dressed young Sami man [Nils-Aslak Valkeapää] actually connect with me after a casual introduction? I could hardly believe that possible here - halfway around the world - at Port Alberni, British Columbia. The introduction caused a flurry of interest among the Sami delegates...but I'm ahead of myself.

Let me try to set the stage for what became for me a magical moment, a spiritual affirmation, a bonding with indigenous people that uncovered my own Sami connection.

In the fall of 1975 I was asked by Dr. Loren Halvorson, professor of Church and Society at Luther Theological Seminary, if I would be open to an invitation from the Lutheran World Federation Peace and Justice Office to participate as an observer at two international conferences: one on World Development and Internationalization of Mission in Zurich, Switzerland, and the second, the historic first gathering of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) at Port

Alberni, British Columbia. I felt honored to be invited.

Prior to my leaving, I was asked by Native American leaders in Minneapolis if I would represent some of their concerns at the Zurich conference. I was given extensive documentation that identified the abuse and detention of Sarah Bad Heart Bull, the heroic Lakota mother who challenged illegal U.S. government actions surrounding the death of her son Wesley, (the catalyst of the standoff between the U.S. government and the American Indian Movement at Wounded Knee, South Dakota). For two days I met with the staff of Amnesty International in London unfolding the case of Sarah Bad Heart Bull.

After spending the following week at the conference in Zurich, I went on to Copenhagen to meet with Dr. Nils Kleven, the Danish University advocate who initiated the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA). Dr. Kleven and Jorgen Lissner of the Lutheran World Federation had been instrumental in arranging for two observers at the first WCIP meeting. I was designated as one of those persons.

So there I was, in Port Alberni,

somewhat exhausted from unfamiliar global travel, seated at the breakfast table with a group of people dressed in traditional clothing of which I was completely ignorant.

Yes, indeed I was related to the Muus. from Snåsa, north of *Trondheimsfjord*. No, I had never been to Norway. Yes, I should visit. No, I did not know anything about my own Sami background, about Sami people in general, nor had I heard of the Nordic Sami Council. Nor was I aware that a year earlier, Sami people from across northern Norway, Sweden, Finland - and even Russia - gathered in Snåsa for a council meeting specifically to plan for this historic event involving indigenous people from all around the globe.

That was my introduction, over breakfast, to the incredible delegation from Samiland who literally electrified the WCIP. I remember Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, the gifted Sami artist and poet, as one of the leaders of the delegation. "You look like my cousin," I told him!

Sami concerns regarding human rights and civil justice were eloquently stated by a variety of spokespersons.

There were indigenous delegations large and small from dozens of global communities: Indian nations across North America (Mohawk, Lakota, Pawite, Blackfoot, Ojibwe, Cree, Hopi, Iroquois); Indian People from Ecuador, Columbia, Chiapas; Inuit from Alaska, Greenland and northern Canada; Maori from New Zealand; Aborigines from Australia; and Sami from their northern homeland. It was an incredible gathering. Simultaneous translation in seven languages, firsthand reports of the systematic genocide of people and the invasion of their land base, workshops given over to documentation of specific governmental and institutional abuse, and through it all, a building of common ground, mutuality and old fashioned friendship.

Every evening throughout the week was given over to celebration and story telling. A potlatch was held, South American drums were heard, traditional native dances were featured. Stories centered on the Earth and Her care, on myths of Creation and renewal, on respect for elders and the yet unborn - on the sacred circles of life. The themes were strangely familiar.

The evening with the Samis was espe-

cially dramatic. Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (Ailohaš) was brilliant. There were Sami drums. Joiking was taught to all. Hans Ragnar Mathisen (Elle Hansa) thrilled us with his descriptive stories. Others explained the Sami traditional dress. The long night passed all too quickly. Such festivity did not obscure the deep passion the Sami held for the preservation of their land base and their opposition to the Alta-Kautokeino dam project which was threatening their traditional reindeer territories. In fact, the delegation from Sápmi served as a major contributor in the formation of the WCIP.

Under the skilled leadership of George Manuel (Assiniboine) and Sam Deloria (Lakota), a Solemn Declaration of the Indigenous People of the World was adopted during the closing ceremonies. Each delegation rose to one by one, affirm their commitment to the principles of the Solemn Declaration. [See left.] It was a moving culmination to an event laced with emotional and eloquent pleas for justice, peace and freedom.

My consciousness of the interrelatedness of all indigenous Peoples had been marvelously expanded. My ignorance of my own Sami connectedness had been uncovered and my spiritual center had been embraced by generous Sami kinfolk.

Pastor Muus is the founder of the Plymouth Youth Center, Minneapolis and Wilderness Canoe Base, Grand Marais, Minnesota. He is a lifetime walk-along friend in solidarity with the Midwest American Indian community.



[Editor's note: Anja Kittu, a Lule Sami from Inari, Finland was a member of the Sami delegation to Port Alberni. Now living in Toronto, Canada, she is an active participant in North American Sami events.]

WCIP:

"The joik revealed and manifested the connection that exists between all indigenous Peoples."

"I was fortunate to participate in the first meeting of the WCIP in Canada in 1975. It was a great moment, to see and to feel that we had sisters and brothers in every part of the world too. It strengthened our struggle and it boosted our self esteem as an indigenous People.

"There is one special incident that has impressed itself on my memory. It was the very first day and all the indigenous people from different parts of the world were learning to know each other. We, the Samis, came from all over Scandinavia, most of us with blond hair and fair complexions. We noticed there were people who were trying to avoid us, as if they were afraid, and we could not figure out why.

"An evening came when it was our turn to tell about ourselves and our Sami culture. Nils-Aslak Valkeapää was in our group and he went on stage to joik. Something happened! The joik revealed and manifested the connection that exists between all indigenous Peoples. Those who had been avoiding us the previous evening came closer to us and we to them."

Edel Haetta Eriksen

[Editor's note: The above quotation is from Edel Haetta Eriksen's opening statement to "From Generation to Generation - from People to People," a conference held in September 1993 in Guovdageaidnu [Kautokeino, Norway]. Eriksen is one of the driving forces in Sami cultural life. She was Director of the Sami Educational Council from 1976 to 1986 and has been awarded the Order of St. Olav. The quotation is reprinted from *Rapport fra konferansen og kulturmonstringa i Kautokeino.*]

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that, «We are the Indigenous Peoples, we are a People
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**And rising up after centuries of oppression,
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in the memory of our Indigenous martyrs,
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**We vow to control again our own destiny and
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Port Alberni 1975