



Yachay Wasi

(Quechua: House of Learning)

Luis Delgado Hurtado, President
Marie-Danielle Samuel, Vice President
Eliane Lacroix-Hopson, Treasurer

“Sacred Sites and the Environment from an Indigenous Perspective”

A side event of the fifth session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (15 – 26 May 2006)
Sponsored and organized by Yachay Wasi – Hosted by the United Nations Environment Programme
Friday 19 May 2006 – 1:15 pm thru 2:45 pm – UNEP Conference Room DC2 8th Floor

CONCLUSIONS

Recognition of Indigenous Sacred Sites around the world threatens the existing order:

1. governments who may lose control of some of their territories and water resources;
2. business and industries which are interested in mineral resources;
3. the dominant Western society which labels ancient, so called “primitive”, religions that it does not understand as “pagan”. This concept is propagated in universities, museums and the media;
4. established religions which are based on man-made dogmas and history, on a lucrative clergy order and have lost contact with the Creator and His Creation.

The first nations of the world, Indigenous communities, kept their connection with the Creator through His Creation by respecting and preserving the Mother Earth of which they were a part. Their sacred sites were the spiritual and concrete symbol of this commitment.

Science and technology have progressed rapidly over the past 150 years, contributing at times to the destruction of the Environment, modern term for Mother Earth.

Harmony between science and religion must be restored, as it was in ancient times...

Yachay Wasi organized this event to bring attention to the following points:

- The international community must consider the protection of the environment a spiritual duty, as demonstrated by Indigenous peoples.
- Sites sacred to Indigenous peoples around the world must be respected and protected by the governments of modern countries where they are located.
- Desecration of burial sites of Indigenous ancestors, including unearthing and display of their remains in labs and museums, must cease.
- UNESCO World Heritage Committee must consult with Indigenous communities whose Sacred sites are on UNESCO World Heritage list on the best way to protect and promote these sites. Sustainable tourism around these sacred world heritage sites must benefit local Indigenous communities, replacing the current grand scale eco-tourism of benefit to foreign entities.

UNESCO already had the opportunity to act on this last point when the idea of a **World Heritage Indigenous Peoples Council of Experts (WHIPCOE)** was presented to the 24th session of the World Heritage Committee in Cairns, Australia by Indigenous representatives from Australia, Canada and New Zealand who had attended a Forum of Indigenous People in Cairns on 24 November 2000.

The initiative was taken in response to the concern of indigenous peoples for their lack of involvement in the development and implementation of laws, policies and plans for the protection of their knowledge, traditions and cultural values which apply to their ancestral lands, within or comprising sites now designated as World Heritage properties.

Following on from the discussions in Cairns, an Indigenous Peoples Working Group with representatives from Australia, Canada and New Zealand further developed the idea in a paper that was presented to the 25th session of the Bureau of the Committee held at UNESCO Headquarters in June 2001. The Bureau paid tribute to the work of the Indigenous Peoples Working Group, debated the issue and recommended that the proposal to establish WHIPCOE be considered by the 25th session of the World Heritage Committee in Helsinki in December 2001.

Due to the interest expressed by many Delegates and Observers at the Bureau meeting, the Bureau established a new Working Group composed of representatives from Australia, Belize, Canada, Ecuador, the United States of America, ICOMOS, IUCN, ICCROM and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. The Bureau requested that the Working Group hold a workshop to further discuss the proposal to establish WHIPCOE. The workshop was hosted by Parks Canada in Winnipeg, Canada, 17-19 September 2001. Luis Delgado Hurtado, President of Yachay Wasi, attended the workshop, at the funded invitation of UNESCO.

This prompted Yachay Wasi to organize a Panel Discussion in 2002 to share these good news! But....

From the report WHC-01/CONF.208/24 of the 25th session of the World Heritage Committee in Helsinki, December 2001:

“...the Committee did not approve the establishment of WHIPCOE as a consultative body of the Committee or as a network to report to the Committee. The Committee did not provide funding for a second meeting to discuss WHIPCOE as proposed in WHC-01/CONF.208/13. However, the Committee encouraged professional research and exchange of views on the subject.”

Based on this last line, Yachay Wasi event was organized with the cooperation of an officer from UNESCO World Heritage Centre to inform of what could have been: **“Cultural Heritage and Sacred Sites: World Heritage from an Indigenous perspective”**, 15 May 2002 at New York University during the historic First session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. This event featured speakers from Indigenous Nations, UNESCO NY Office and UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Sacred sites case studies from 37 world Indigenous nations were given at the seminar and included in a report. <http://www.yachaywasi-ngo.org/sacredcall.htm>

This is why UNESCO was the first UN agency approached by Yachay Wasi in 2006 for co-sponsorship for a follow-up event on the issue of Indigenous Sacred Sites. However, the good will demonstrated by UNESCO in 2002 was not repeated in 2006 when, 45 days before the event, Yachay Wasi was told to look for another co-sponsor.

On very short notice, Mr. Jim Sniffen, Public Information Officer for the United Nations Environment Programme in NYC, was able to facilitate the hosting of the event in UNEP Conference Room. On May 18, Mr. Sniffen provided also the Studio 4 at UN Hqrs for the showing of a DVD received from Hawaii illustrating the Sacred Site Submission #10. “Mauna Kea, Temple under siege” was sent to Yachay Wasi by its producers Puhipau and Joan Lander of Na Maka o ka ‘Aina, Hawaii, on the recommendation of Ms. Kealoha Pisciotta, writer of sub. 10.

DVD was also shown repeatedly during the second week of Forum in the Indigenous exhibit area in UN Visitors lobby, courtesy of Ms. Jan Arnesen, Chief, Exhibits Unit, UN DPI.

For information on DVD: www.namaka.com

On May 19, the event took place in a full room. Meeting opened with a musical number performed by Mr. William Luna, composer/singer from Cuzco, Peru who is well known in South America. This was his first trip to USA. He was invited by Yachay Wasi to observe the fifth session of UNPFII.

He sang the *Huayno* Valicha, traditional song popular in Peru, written in the Andean village of Acopia, birthplace of Yachay Wasi co-founder and president Luis Delgado Hurtado.

Panel was moderated by Ms. Marie-Danielle Samuel, Yachay Wasi co-founder and Main Rep. to UN, who organized the event, wrote and distributed the report.

Eliane Lacroix-Hopson, co-founder of Yachay Wasi, attended the meeting.

UN Radio covered the event, showing that the issue of Indigenous Sacred sites is of interest to the media. Luis Delgado Hurtado was also interviewed on May 24 by Spanish UN Radio on sacred sites in Peru, specifically Machu Picchu. Segment was broadcast on May 30.

Yachay Wasi appreciated the participation of all speakers:

Mr. Parshuram Tamang, second term Member of UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, who is dedicated to the cause of Indigenous sacred sites.

Mr. John Scott, Secretariat of the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), who has for a long time been active on this issue, as he then represented the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the 2002 panel. CBD has taken concrete steps toward the protection of Indigenous Sacred sites.

Ms. Ina Mc Neil, Lakota Nation, who gave the initial spiritual input to the panel.

Ms. Andrea Carmen, International Indian Treaty Council; Ms. Mildred Gandia Reyes, filling in for Naniki Reyes Ocasio, Puerto Rico; Mr. Albert de Terville, Saint Lucia; Ms. Mililani Trask, Hawaii and Mr. Luis Delgado Hurtado, Yachay Wasi, Peru.

Yachay Wasi thanks senders of submissions:

Dr. Greesh Sharma, India; Daniel Vogt, Guatemala; Ms. Celilia Musongong, AFTRADEMOP, Cameroon; Mr. Mingma Norbu Sherpa, Nepal; Mr. Lembulung M. Ole Kosyando**, Tanzania; Dr. C. G. Kushalappa, India; Mr. Jim Anderson, USA; Mr. Cayetano Lucero Gonzalez, Mexico; Prof. Pei Sheng-ji, China; Ms. Kealoha Pisciotto**, Hawaii; Dr. Aneesa Kassam & Dr. Gemetchu Megerssa, forwarded by Sambo Galabu, Ethiopia; Mr. David Garcia**, Guatemala; Mr. Radford Quamahongnewa, USA; Ms. Audrey Keesing, Hawaii; Ms. Victoria Sharakhmatova, Russia; Ms. Andrea Carmen, USA; Ms. Angela Mooney-D'Arcy, USA; Dante Viracocha**, Argentina; Mr. Yat Or Kiptum, Kenya; Ms. Courtney Coyle**, USA; Mr. Paul Pommier, Barbareno Chumash Council**, USA; Mr. Gopal Raj Sherchan, Nepal; Mr. Hugh M. Akagi**, Canada; Chairman A. Brian Wallace**, USA; Ms. Erjin Khamaganova, Russia; Dr. Albert DeTerville**, Saint Lucia.

** already sent a case to 2002 panel

Yachay Wasi added its submission on its Inka Challenge.

Special thanks also to Yachay Wasi's intern Anne-Marie Gribnau who left New York City on June 1, 2006 to return to her home in the Netherlands.

All documents involved have been posted at <http://www.yachaywasi-ngo.org/SC06report.htm>

Hard copies of total report will be mailed to submissions senders and speakers. Report will be also given to Ms. Elsa Stamatopoulou, Chief, Secretariat of Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, to Ms. Laetitia Zobel and Mr. Jim Sniffen, UNEP and other UN agencies officers.

19 June 2006