

Editor's note: This is a transcript of Steven Newcomb (Lenape, Shawnee) speaking at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) 12th Session regarding the High Level Plenary Meeting – World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (HLPW-WCIP). The [Twelfth Session of the Permanent Forum](#) was held 20-31 May 2013 at UN Headquarters, New York, on the topic, “Special Theme: Review Year”. See “[Decisions and Recommendations of the North American Indigenous Peoples’ Caucus \[NAIPC\]](#) to the 12th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and to other bodies and fora, as appropriate.”

Steven Newcomb Intervention at the U.N. High Level Plenary Meeting World Conference on Indigenous Peoples

U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 12th Session, 20-31 May 2013



[MP3 Recording](#) (05:05, 7.3 MB)

Chair: Paul Kanyinke Sena: Mr. Steven Newcomb, Indigenous Law Institute, so that we can get the legal perspective and all discuss.

Steven Newcomb: Thank You Mr. Chairman. Let me begin by paying my respects to my Lenape, Muncie, and Delaware ancestors for it is on our traditional territory that this United Nations building stands. Mannahatta is an Algonquin word.

The [Indigenous Law Institute](#) takes this opportunity to comment on the High Level Plenary Meeting of the UN General Assembly to be called the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples which will be convened here in our traditional territory in 2014. The UN High Level Plenary Meeting is being framed as an opportunity to implement the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) including, of course, Article 3 of the UN Declaration which affirms the right to self-determination.

Article 3

Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

We have grave concerns about the prospect of such a High Level Plenary Meeting when states such as the United States takes positions that are contrary to the full right of self-determination for Indigenous Nations and Peoples.

Mr. Chairman, I want to take this opportunity to state unequivocally that the Indigenous Law Institute does not accept the view, or suggestion by any state, such as the United States, that the right of self-determination affirmed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is different from the already existing right of self-determination in international law. The suggestion that there is a standard and right of self-determination for Indigenous Peoples and Nations that is different from the standard and right of self-determination for all peoples in international law is racist and predicated on ancient theological, political bigotry. There is nothing in the history of the development of the UN Declaration that supports the view of Article 3, reiterated by the United States in this forum on May 22nd 2013.

Mr. Chairman, our Originally Free Nations and Peoples of great Turtle Island entered the international arena in the 20th century because of the lack of redress in, for example, U.S. federal Indian law.

Based on our spiritual work and historical investigations over the past three decades we now know that such lack of redress is founded on the doctrine of discovery and domination as enshrined in the US Supreme Court ruling *Johnson versus McIntosh* and it's assertion of a title to our lands and territories independent of our will based upon the supposed Christian discovery of the lands of non-christian nations and peoples.

To affect fundamental change we have to engage in fundamental analysis of the root causes of the domination and dehumanization that is inflicted by states on a daily basis on our Original Nations and Peoples and that results in so much destruction. The only way for the UN Declaration to create fundamental reform is if we are able to use that international instrument as an opportunity to engage in deep structure analysis of the underlying reason for the state system of the world continuing to define our Nations and Peoples as innately inferior.

This is of course based on fictional symbolic acts of possession and sovereignty, racism, and Christian war against our unbaptized ancestors all in the name of the blessings of evangelism and the blessings of civilization. The Christianizing mission and the civilizing mission are two sides of the same sword blade.

Mr. Chairman, the issues being dealt with in the United Nations regarding our Original Nations and Peoples are a direct outgrowth and contemporary version of debates that took place in early centuries which were also debates about the significance of the dominating and dehumanizing [Vatican papal bulls of the 15th and early 16th century](#) issued by the Holy See. The UN High Level

Plenary Meeting, to be known as a World Conference on Indigenous Peoples will not result in positive and fundamental reform for our Nations and Peoples unless it is used as an opportunity to engage in the kinds of moral discussions that took place in the sixteenth century. Those debates were engaged in by such personalities as [Bartolomé de las Casas](#) and [Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda](#) regarding Aristotle's theory of natural domination or slavery and whether our ancestors were human. The difference today of course is that we have our own voices.

Wanishi.