

**Economic and Social Council
Commission on Human Rights
Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights
Working Group on Indigenous Populations
19th Session. 23-27 July 2001**

Item 5

**Intervention by Rosalie Little Thunder
On behalf of the Buffalo Nations**

July 25, 2001

Madame Chairperson and Members of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations. Le anpetu ki cantewasteya napeciyuzapi (This day, I touch your hand with a good heart.)

Because of the hardships that we endure, we are naturally given to much prayer. My relatives tell me that you are a compassionate person with great responsibilities and so, I too am encouraged by your leadership and will certainly offer my prayers for you.

Madame Chairperson, I am here today because I have nowhere else to go, to seek protection for my relatives, the buffalo.

Most cultures have legends of creation and of their own origins and how we came to know the right way to live. The Lakota evolved from the buffalo and emerged from beneath the Earth as human beings, at a place called Wind Cave in the Black Hills of South Dakota. We have a pact of interdependence with our relatives, the buffalo. We followed their migratory path and learned from them how to live according to Natural Law, at peace with the natural forces. Our teachings on how to be good human beings were brought to us by Pte San Win, who came and left as a White Buffalo Calf. Our survival was centered on the existence of the buffalo. The prophecies of our future survival are also centered on the existence of the buffalo.

These beliefs are now being supported by the scientific community that recognizes the buffalo as a keystone species, creating habitat for other species.

In the 1800's, the U.S. Calvary wastefully slaughtered 50 to 60 million buffaloes, in order to deprive the elusive Lakota of their sustaining food source and thereafter, captured, killed, imprisoned, and took extreme measures to subdue the Lakota Nation.

As a result of the massacre of millions of buffaloes from the Plains ecosystem, severe erosion occurred, and the land nearly became a desert. The damage continues to unfold, but our lifetimes are too short too see the long-term impact. Our ancestors' wisdom; careful observation and intergenerational storytelling is not always acknowledged by decision-makers.

The remnants of the 1800's buffalo slaughter is continuing in Yellowstone National Park. During the unusually harsh winter of 1996-1997, the buffalo migrated out of the park in search of food. The Department of Livestock of the State of Montana slaughtered 1,100 buffaloes, one-third of the last herd of wild buffalo in the United States. They justified their actions as an attempt to protect their cattle from a disease threat that is questioned by the country's leading scientists. The buffalo are being slaughtered on

the northern and western boundaries, in the jurisdiction of the state of Montana, where influential cattlemen graze their cattle on Forest Service land at very inexpensive rates. This public land is intended for wildlife habitat but the buffaloes are not allowed to inhabit this area.

There are federal mandates to hold government-to-government consultations with native nations, but the United States government does not respond to requests by the Lakota people to negotiate for the protection of the Yellowstone buffalo at the highest levels. National Park Service employees continue to attend consultation meetings on behalf of the government with our leadership, but without the necessary authority to negotiate.

Although a Long-Term Bison (Buffalo) Management Plan has been drafted and approved by the Environmental Impact Study team, it has excluded participation and comments by native people and only provides for alternative methods of continuing the extermination of the buffaloes.

That a species of wildlife can be massacred into extinction or domesticated so carelessly is of grave concern to the Buffalo Nations people. Since the buffaloes will never be truly safe in Yellowstone National Park, we have begun a campaign to acquire necessary land for a refuge for wild buffaloes. This refuge is not intended to domesticate or market buffaloes, but to return the land to the buffalo for healing purposes and to allow the buffaloes to exist in their natural state.

Madame Chairperson, this is no trivial matter to the Lakota people and the other buffalo-centered cultures. Our prophecy is: As long as there are buffalo, we will survive as a people. Beyond the survival of the Lakota, I believe the prophecy is about humanity's survival. That in the carelessness of those whose vision is limited and who can only think in terms of ownership, control, and profit, we risk the survival of humanity.

Madame Chairperson, we respectfully request the Working Group on Indigenous Populations to acknowledge the Buffalo Refuge as a model of true Indigenous Development that is in keeping with Indigenous Peoples' responsibility to the Earth and its inhabitants.

We seek support in establishing true government to government consultation with the United States government, at the highest level, relative to the matter of the buffalo.

We further seek support in encouraging the United States government to honor its own mandates by returning Forest Service land surrounding Yellowstone National Park back to its main purpose, wildlife habitat, and to cease cattle grazing allotments.

Finally, Madame Chairperson, we urge the governments and this body to condemn the slaughter of the Yellowstone buffalo.