

Cory Bilyea

Interpretive/Informative Editorial

## Editorial



Cory Bilyea

# Indigenous presence noticeably absent at United Nations New York summit

The most important issue in the world today is the state of the planet. The climate, water, global warming and extreme climate change affecting the oceans and the forests are all on everyone's radar. The treatment of Indigenous Peoples across the globe in the push to claim land and resources is included in this issue, as they stand up and fight for their rights, including the right to protect Mother Earth.

The United Nations (UN) held a summit in New York on Sept. 21, 2019 to address the efforts to meet strict carbon reduction targets set by climate scientists. There was representation from all over the world, but only one leader representing Indigenous people. The "tokenistic" representation was noticed by Aboriginal Peoples Television Network when "just one Indigenous leader was permitted to speak at the summit Monday, and he was only given two minutes."

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) states “Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is a specific right that pertains to Indigenous peoples ... it allows them to give or withhold consent to a project that may affect them or their territories. Once they have given their consent, they can withdraw it at any stage. Furthermore, FPIC enables them to negotiate the conditions under which the project will be designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated.”

Article 5 of UNDRIP states, “Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions, while retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State.”

So, why was there only one Indigenous person there, representing a vast, culturally diverse group of people?

Tuntiak Katan from the Shuar people of Ecuador was given two minutes to deliver Indigenous commitments to world leaders attending the summit. Those commitments were:

- The implementation of holistic plans to protect biocultural diversity
- Rights to lands, territories and resources, self-determination and free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), and
- Access the development of renewable energies

Even the youth were segregated from the main summit, and separated into Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups, even though they were talking about the same things,

according to Makasa Looking Horse, a Six Nations leader invited to open the Youth Summit with a blessing.

“There was a disconnect,” she said, adding the global youth and Indigenous youth were “both talking about the same thing, and we’re in two different rooms. And I think that speaks volumes about how this topic is treated regarding Indigenous people.”

Youth leaders are stepping up and trying to make their voices heard, social media being their main platform. Autumn Peltier, a youth from Wikwemikong Territory, Manitoulin Island, Ontario, has been advocating for the water since she was eight years old. Greta Thunberg, a 16-year-old from Sweden, started a global movement to combat climate change. Both have been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for their continued work towards clean water and a healthy environment.

According to the World Health Organization, “The UN Secretary-General’s September 2019 Climate Action Summit will bring together commitments to a healthier and safer future for all, through actions to (1) save lives, cut carbon emissions, clean our air; and (2) invest in climate action, public health and sustainable development.”

What appears to be an incredibly expensive photo-op for politicians does not seem to have resulted in any firm direction or solution, just another opportunity to suppress Indigenous voices in complete violation of UNDRIP’s own guidelines.

If there is to be real change it must be universal, inclusive and have incredible speed towards solutions, or there may not be a world for these leaders to lead.