DIGNITY

IN HONOR OF THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Foreword by ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU, Introduction by FAITHKEEPER OREN R. LYONS
Afterword by DANA GLUCKSTEIN, Epilogue by AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANA GLUCKSTEIN
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Foreword by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Introduction by Faithkeeper Oren R. Lyons

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANA GLUCKSTEIN

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United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD have something profound and important to teach those of us who live in the so-called modern world. I have long believed this to be true, even before I discovered to my delight that I was related to the San People of southern Africa. I suspect that if each of us looks far enough back into our genome we will discover that we are all indeed related.

Indigenous Peoples remind us of this fact. They teach us that the first law of our being is that we are set in a delicate network of interdependence with our fellow human beings and with the rest of creation. In Africa recognition of our interdependence is called ubuntu. It is the essence of being human. It speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in yours. I am human because I belong to the whole, to the community, to the tribe, to the nation, to the earth. Ubuntu is about wholeness, about compassion for life. Ubuntu has to do with the very essence of what it means to be human, to know that you are bound up with others in the bundle of life. In our fragile and crowded world we can survive only together. We can be truly free, ultimately, only together. We can be human only together. To care about the rights of Indigenous Peoples is to care about the relatives of one’s own human family.

The Indigenous Peoples of the world have a gift to give that the world needs desperately, this reminder that we are made for harmony, for interdependence. If we are ever truly to prosper, it will be only together.

And this also includes what used to be called “inanimate nature,” but what the elders have always known were relatives in the family of earth. When Africans said, “Oh, don’t treat that tree like that, it feels pain,” others used to say, “Ah, they’re pre-scientific, they’re primitive.” It is wonderful now how we are beginning to discover that it is true—that tree does hurt and if you hurt the tree, in an extraordinary way you hurt yourself. Every place you stand is holy ground; every shrub has the ability to be the burning bush, if we have eyes to see.

We owe a very great debt of gratitude to those who remember the old ways to live and honor the earth. And yet, we have ignored them, oppressed them, and even stripped them of the land that is their life. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is an important step toward protecting these vulnerable members of our human family, of giving them the dignity and the respect that they so richly deserve.

We must be grateful to those who remind us of our common bond. The work of Dana Gluckstein embodies ubuntu. It helps us to truly see, not just appearances, but essences, to see as God sees us, not just the physical form, but also the luminous soul that shines through us. Pick up this glorious book and look into the eyes of your relatives, those distant cousins you have not seen in so many years, for whom your heart ached without knowing. Greet each other again, with the love and healing that comes with reunion, and know that in protecting their rights and their way of life, you protect the wellbeing of us all and the future we share, for we are all, everyone of us, precious members of the family of earth.

God bless you,
DESMOND TUTU

The story of the indigenous peoples has always been told by our oppressors and the myths of 15th-century medieval Europe continue to resonate into the 21st century. In August 1977, 146 delegates from the indigenous nations and communities of North, Central, and South America, as well as Scandinavia, made a historic journey to the United Nations in Geneva to dispel these myths. We carried the hopes of our indigenous nations, seeking justice for centuries of unspeakable crimes against our peoples. The United Nations was, to us, a beacon where, at last, an international tribunal would address and begin restoration of our embattled peoples who were struggling for survival in what was left of our homelands.

In the context of today's politics, we might be thought naïve. But we did then, and still do, believe in a spirit of equity, honor, and justice embodied within humanity. We believe that humanity can bring about responsible leadership and selfless attitudes that will ensure a good life for future generations. And so, when we traveled to the United Nations in 1977, we believed it was finally the time for a new global policy, a Doctrine of Recovery.

Although we did not know it then, that doctrine ideally would replace the Doctrine of Discovery, a doctrine that had arisen from 15th-century medieval Europe and that continued to resonate for five centuries. The quest for a Doctrine of Recovery, as embodied in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, cannot be grasped without an understanding of the dark history of the Doctrine of Discovery.

The discovery of the western Hemisphere presented an opportunity and a quandary for the countries of Europe. At that time Europe was suffering through a succession of plagues that swept through cities and provinces. Famines, often induced by royalty and others of privilege, were common. Standing armies, royal guards, and sheriffs protected these families and enforced a complex system of exchange that traded survival and food for human labor. The most powerful political entity was the Roman Catholic Church. The church conferred sanction and patronage on the armies of Christian countries, who in turn defended the pope's power. Christian doctrine was coercive, enforced by the Inquisition of Catholic law. A simple accusation of heresy could lead to torture and death.

At the time of discovery, however, the Catholic Church's hegemony was threatened. During the reign of Henry VII, the Church of England challenged the power of the Vatican. The discovery of the Americas itself in 1492 provided the feuding pope and king with a joint target—the Indigenous Peoples of the Western Hemisphere. With one sweeping declaration, breathtaking in its scope of arrogance, power, and racism, Pope Alexander VI in 1493 granted to Spain all lands not under Christian rule in the newly discovered regions. King Henry VII quickly followed with a royal charter that proclaimed that Christian monarchs had the right to dominion and ownership over the lands of Indigenous Peoples because they were not Christians. The new lands were treated as if they were empty lands, Terra Nullius, and devoid of human inhabitants, Terra Nullius. Other European nations challenged the idea that one Christian sovereign had title over the entirety of the Americas, but they all agreed with Terra Nullius' and Terra Nullius' dictates. What emerged was the religious-political construct known as the Doctrine of Discovery, that evolved into the Law of Nations and ultimately the system of international law still in effect today. The Catholic Church's 15th-century feudal laws therefore remain part of modern law despite the principle of separation of church and state.

When we traveled to Geneva in 1977 to demand our rights, none of us knew this history. We were just discovering the oppressive religious and political origins of the doctrine. In Geneva, my own people, the Haudenosaunee, more commonly known as the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy, introduced three position papers on politics, law, and economics entitled, A Basic Call to Consciousness: The Haudenosaunee Address to the Western World—a concise history of how the feudal system of Europe developed into the governing systems of the industrial states today in the great halls of the United Nations we heard inspiring speeches and good words. We found allies in this quest for justice and survival, many of whom were poor people who recognized our common cause. We also found brilliant exceptions among people in positions of power who brought
intense and uncompromising spirit and leadership to the task. Ultimately, however, national self-interest prevailed. We realized that the political forces that had stymied us in our homeland were also hampering us in the international arena. This trip to Geneva, we understood, was one step in a long journey of survival for Indigenous Peoples.

Our stamina and understanding of this epic struggle enabled us to keep up the fight for three decades. The centuries of oppression crystallized the values that sustained us and allowed us to stay focused in a world where the moral compass was spinning. On September 13, 2007, the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We were finally recognized as peoples with an “s.” In the vernacular of the United Nations, people is generic; peoples is specific. The day before, on September 12, 2007, we were still referred to as populations or as issues, and, occasionally, as people—but not as a people who deserved international recognition. These designations, consistent with the tenets of the Doctrine of Discovery, denied us human rights.

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizes the 370 million indigenous individuals of the world—our names, our communities, and our nations. Our recognition was momentous not only for the Indigenous Peoples of the world, but also for the states represented by the General Assembly of the United Nations. The Assembly’s decisive action struck down, or at the very least, delivered a hard blow to the racist doctrine that had imprisoned all humanity—the gatekeepers as well as their indigenous victims—since 1492. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was the longest vetted document in the history of the United Nations.

The adoption of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was not a complete victory. 144 states voted for the declaration, 11 states abstained, 34 states did not participate, and four states—Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States—voted against it. The disturbing fact that four states voted against the human rights of Indigenous Peoples and 45 states were more or less neutral indicates how much work remains to be done to bring all the states of the world to acknowledge the rights of Indigenous Peoples. In 2009, Australia issued a public apology and adopted the declaration. After much public protest, in April, 2010, New Zealand adopted the declaration, and the United States announced it would formally review its opposition to the declaration. The declaration itself requires an additional step to become a United Nations Convention and thus officially be part of international law.

We move forward with the help and support of friends and allies. Dana Gluckstein is one of those important friends. I met Dana in 1989 at the International Gathering of Elders at my home in Onondaga, New York. She has dedicated herself to the advancement of Indigenous Peoples through her art and the publication of this historic book. Her work is imbued with sensitivity and love for those she has photographed. Dana has captured the quiet dignity and strength of people who know who they are. I was humbled by her request to write this introduction. I do so with respect, love, and appreciation for her compassion and her presence on this earth.

A thousand years ago or more, the Great Peace Maker came among our people. He introduced the principles of peace, health, equity, justice, and the power of the good minds, which is to say to be united in thought, body, and spirit. He brought peace to our warring nations and he raised new leaders, clan mothers and chiefs, instructing us on our conduct and our responsibilities. Among those many instructions, one continues to resonate around the world today. He said to us, “When you sit in council for the welfare of the people, think not of yourself, nor of your family, nor of your tribe, nor of your nation. Make your decisions for the seventh generation coming so that they may enjoy what you have here today. If you do this, there will be peace.” That is a profound instruction on responsibility that should be the basis for the world’s decision makers today.

Dah ny to (Now I am finished).

OREN R. LYONS, FAITHKEEPER, TURTLE CLAN, ONONDAGA NATION COUNCIL OF CHIEFS

HAUDENOSAUNEE


San Bushmen-Mother and Child, Botswana, 2009

San Bushmen-Healer, Botswana, 2009

San Bushmen-Healer, Botswana, 2009
Festival Boys, Peru, 2006

Aboriginal Artist, Gathering of Elders, Onondaga Nation, New York, 1989
Ovazemba Teenage Girls, Namibia, 2007