



*Preserving America's Heritage*

## **UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

“In response to the many calls from Native Americans throughout this country and in order to further U.S. policy on indigenous issues, President Obama announced that the United States has changed its position on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Declaration). The United States supports the Declaration, which—while not legally binding or a statement of current international law—has both moral and political force. It expresses both the aspirations of indigenous peoples around the world and those of States in seeking to improve their relations with indigenous peoples. Most importantly, it expresses aspirations of the United States, aspirations that this country seeks to achieve within the structure of the U.S. Constitution, laws, and international obligations, while also seeking, where appropriate, to improve our laws and policies.”

On September 13, 2007, the U.N. General Assembly adopted the Declaration by a vote of 143 in favor, 11 abstentions, 34 not participating, and 4 opposed. The United States was one of the four nations that opposed the Declaration. On April 20, 2010, at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Ambassador Susan Rice announced that the U.S. would undertake a formal review of its position, in consultation with Indian tribes and others. The Administration held multiple consultation meetings with tribal leaders and other meetings with interested groups and individuals. The Administration received over 3,000 written submissions. An interagency team reviewed and considered all of the comments received and carefully considered the 46 articles contained in the Declaration.

On December 16, 2010, at the second White House Tribal Nations Conference, President Obama announced the United States' support for the Declaration. The State Department also released a document to accompany President Obama's announcement that provides a more detailed [statement](#) about US support and ongoing work in Indian Country.

The Declaration is not legally binding but is an inspirational international instrument that includes a broad range of provisions regarding the relationship between nations, organizations and indigenous peoples and individuals. While not legally binding, the Declaration has both moral and political force.

The Declaration is an important instrument, in part, because of the breadth of its provisions on issues of concern to indigenous peoples. The Administration, however, does not see support for the Declaration as an end in itself. In President Obama's words, “[w]hat matters far more than words—what matters far more than any resolution or declaration—are actions to match those words.” Accordingly, the Administration is looking to the principles embodied in the Declaration to meaningfully address the challenges that Indian tribes face.

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