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Council Chief Sachem Larry L. Fisher, PhD  
Mattakeeset Massachusset Tribal  
Government

03/17/2021

**RE: Situation of Indigenous Peoples Living in Urban Areas**

**UN Office of the High Commissioner for the Human Rights**

**76th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations**

Dear

Aquene Wunnekesuk Neetmpoaug Madam Chair,

The Mattakeeset Tribe welcomes the efforts of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in this virtual consultation in regard to shedding light in the situation of indigenous peoples living in urban areas. The Mattakeeset Tribe wishes to extend its expert recommendation to the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by reassuring article 3's right to self-determination enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Moreover, our Tribal Nation is pleased to observe that the UN Office of the High

Commissioner for Human Rights feels compelled to report to the 76th session of the general assembly on this very matter.

Let me begin by quoting the late great Chief Black Elk.

*The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves. ... But the Wasichus [white men] have put us in these square boxes. Our power is gone and we are dying, for the power is not in us any more.* - Chief Black Elk

Madam Chair it is clear that the effects of colonial architecture are very much evident in the design and structure of the world today since the inception of Sir John Dee who was the court astronomer and advisor to Queen Elizabeth I. The way we live and the way we interact with each other today as indigenous peoples has been greatly influenced by the colonial buildings that have stood the test of time and the people who built them. Today we observe that the effects of colonial architecture can also be seen in the way people feel about themselves and about the places in which they live in.

### **Architecture and psychological trauma**

Have you known, the effects of architecture which by extension leads to the psychological trauma of indigenous peoples in the United States are numerous?

One small community in British Columbia, Canada, called Maple Ridge was famous as a Canadian model for First World Tourist homes. Yet, the very same architectural style was responsible for the brutal death of its Indigenous population from a dam project that was to be built. This event came about because of how the developers of the development intended to use floodwater to help fill in the dam. When the first residents of the planned development discovered that a large portion of the flooding water would be

taken in and turned into urine, they sued the Canadian government for their right to exist.

Madam Chair, these effects in the United States are not limited to the dispossession of our lands. In the process of dispossession, the demolishing of our homelands and the forcing of our people from their homes and communities is being accompanied by psychological and emotional trauma. The impact is far worse than simply the actual physical demolition of a home. The feeling of dispossession, the fear and panic of being caught outside in the cold or the feeling that one's children may be harmed by white men in the approaching rain is far more than the actual physical destruction of what a home can represent.

Madam Chair, as I conclude my statement today I urge urban developers to strongly consider the social consequences of a colonial architectural structure when assigning value to it. One example of this is the effect that it has on the indigenous persons sense of self-worth. Modern architects today pride themselves on the way in which they make humans feel as if they are worthy of feeling good about themselves. The result is that people will go to great lengths to achieve the very best in themselves because they believe that they deserve it. In turn this leads to an increase in the number of people who try to achieve that peak level of self-worth.

Colonial Architecture also has a profound psychological effect on people's psychology in general. People who live in the urban environment, for instance, have become accustomed to seeing large concrete and steel buildings wherever they go. They are thus used to being bombarded by visual stimulus such as these structures. Even scenes with natural vegetation are often accompanied by images of concrete and steel skyscrapers. Such visual cues have a powerful psychological effect on the indigenous person who sees them.

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Chief Sachem

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