

Priscilla Settee PhD.

This paper is a speech given by Priscilla Settee at the Community Economic Development International meeting held in May 2008 in Saskatoon.

In the Cree world view, a core value is *miyo-wichihtowin*, which means “having good relations”. Individually and collectively people are instructed by cultural teachings to strive and conduct themselves in ways that create positive relationships with our extended community. The concept of extended community and family is fundamental in Indigenous communities. Aunts, uncles, and grandparents are surrogate parents. The community is an extension of the family. The idea of relationship is extended to the animals and the natural environment. These are ones who cannot speak for themselves, but whose existence is essential to human survival. The extended community takes in all relationships, human and nonhuman, and is reflected in our interdependence. Reference is made to the concept of all my relations, which means that all living things are related and must be cared for by one other. Service to humanity is primary.

Cree values are embedded in natural laws called *wakohtowin*. The circle symbol reflects the equality of all people and their capability to care for, nurture, protect, and heal the people and the land. It is important to emphasize the holism of non-Industrialized Indigenous peoples. As a university professor I try to help my non-Indigenous students see their relationships with Indigenous peoples. We share environments, communities, lands and resources. Our human survival is interconnected.

Community norms have been disrupted by colonialism, including intentional breakup of families communities and nations, by imposed borders, residential schools, the accommodation of new settler populations who now have third fourth and fifth

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generations. We say that all people except Indigenous peoples are immigrants and some have seniority usually the ones that make all the rules.

The western capitalist system promotes educational individualism and moving ahead of fellow human beings undermines what is at the heart of the concept of *wakohtowin*, the betterment of all our relations. Historically and today our domestic & political issues originate in our relationship with the church and state and their establishment of empires. The establishment of empires has meant the deconstruction of traditional cultures and their economic systems. As part of the Legacy of colonialism through the Residential school experience, children were routinely sexually and physically abused, humiliated, and beaten for speaking their language. So many children died as a result of this horrific time in history that some refer to the residential school period as the Indigenous holocaust.

Colonization has been particularly devastating for Native women. Economic analysis fail to describe the multiple ways women have disproportionately suffered under colonization from sexual violence, forced sterilization to the undermining of women's central role as community organizers, planners and leaders. One of the tragic aspects of Canadian history is the Legacy of the disappearances and deaths of over 500 young Native Women. Many had been fostered or adopted at young age. Some had been carcerated and had unresolved personal issues and addictions. While some were involved in prostitution and risky lifestyles, many were simply in wrong place at wrong time. Many were homeless, most lived in poverty and all were targeted as Aboriginal women.. To this day public and societal indifference continues to leaves Aboriginal women at risk.

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Indigenous women are the unrecognized backbones of our communities who build social support networks and keep culture intact through our struggles to establish relevant educational institutions and keeping our languages alive. Women preserve the social, cultural and natural foundations of their communities and establish norms that retain traditions and challenge undemocratic practices. Women's economic contributions are seldom counted. Women challenge the status quo by being on the front lines when the world's wealthiest transnational corporations carve up our lands and pillage them through free trade agreements, multinational investment agreements with the license of undemocratic bodies such as World Trade Organization and their financial partners.

Women from Canoe Lake in northern Saskatchewan worked on the frontlines when our communities were clearcut by forest company giants. Women including elders were jailed in Sheshashit, Labrador, while attempting to stop NATO war games on their lands. Today women fight racist elements in the state and sexist elements in their communities. Many university classes I have taught are attended predominantly by women who sustain families single-handedly, and become educated in order to provide for their families. There is a saying that a nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground. We are living proof that hearts can rise, hope can flourish, peace can exist and a new world can be built.

Colonization continuing legacy is now transforming our communities into globalized market places at the fringe of "development". Many northern communities where urban marginalized people immigrate from suffer from economically deprived conditions and lack economic infrastructure and services expected in southern communities

Poverty:

UNICEF's report on Child Poverty in developed countries ranks Canada near the bottom for children's well-being, at 17 out of 23 countries. Single mothers and their children experience the worst levels of poverty. 81% of single mothers with children under the age of 7 live in poverty.

- Food banks: A U.N. Human Rights committee noted that the number of food banks in Canada grew from 75 in 1984 to 625 by 1998.
- A U.N. Human Rights Committee criticized Canada for adopting policies that have increased poverty and homelessness among many vulnerable groups (such as children and women) during a time of strong economic growth and increasing affluence.

Environment:

In Canada human rights violations have meant a boil water condition on large numbers of communities, epidemic suicide rates among our youth, structural unemployment rates of 60% plus for the majority of our communities, early death from preventable diseases, outstanding land claims and outstanding residential school settlements. This while both provincial and federal governments make record profits on our resources which have never been signed away or ceded.

Clear cuts, mercury poisoning, oil exploration sour gas plants, bombing ranges, dams and mines have taken tremendous tolls on communities causing never before seen cancers, mercury poisonings, and loss of traditional economies which are replaced with capital intensive projects that export profits outside the communities and leave communities poisoned and unfit for human survival forcing people to urban centers where they face housing crises and gang threats.

Currently in Canada there are a number of front line attacks on Indigenous Sacred lands, the Lubicon Cree who are fighting further oil exploration in an area where treaties

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or First Nations land entitlement have not been settled, Dudley George, an Anishnabe man was murdered by OPP for defending his land at Ipperwash Park, Ontario in 1995.

Today the people of the Mohawk nation are engaged in violent opposition and attacks within their own territories. In northern Saskatchewan the Buffalo River Dene Nation have taken their case to the World Court to challenge loss of traditional hunting territories. These 4 cases are the tip of longstanding claims against the governments of Saskatchewan and Canada. Last month several leaders from Ontario were jailed for opposing uranium and platinum mining.

Provincial prisons are filled to capacity so desperate is the Saskatoon provincial jail - prisoners are stockpiled in small cells and forced to use pails for toilets.

The question I ask:

- Is this what the original treaties were signed for, is this what free and informed consent is about, is this what human rights amounts to while daily the wealth of the top income earners in Canada amounts to millions and billions of dollars. These are conditions that make a sham of the Canadian Constitution under which Indigenous peoples are promised protection. Indigenous peoples have constitutional rights to have prior, informed consent on their lands.

Indigenous peoples feel the impact of globalization, which is no more than a continuation of the brutal economic and political processes of colonialism and imperialism of the past centuries.

These conditions have motivated millions of Indigenous peoples to build linkages and develop the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples. It is called the most comprehensive nonbinding agreement which has the endorsement of the world's some

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370 million Indigenous peoples or 7% of the world population. Indigenous peoples are no insignificant forces. They are from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds, with tremendous range of knowledges that have contributed greatly to global food security but have never been acknowledged or compensated. Since colonization experience they share commonalities such as: lack of basic healthcare; limited access to education; loss of control over land; abject poverty; displacement; human rights violations; and economic and social marginalization. In 2007 the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was ratified without the support of Canada, Australia and New Zealand, the countries with the most significant Indigenous peoples. In its opposition to the Declaration our Federal Government claimed incredibly that the Declaration contravenes Canadian laws including the Canadian Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Despite Canada's intransigence and arrogance, the Declaration represents a commitment by the signatories to meaningfully consult and engage in partnerships in legislation and policy that will affect Aboriginal people in Canada. The failure of the Canadian government to ratify the Declaration is a cause of great concern but is a victory for people who strive for democracy.

What is to be done?

There is a need to right the historical wrongs. Treaty land entitlement and Métis claims must be settled to ensure royalties from lands and resources are paid to fund economic development. Emphasis must be placed on social economies and putting women & families at the center of development and economic analysis. As Indigenous peoples we are not asking for handouts we are demanding that the terms of treaties be honoured those treaties that granted new immigrants rights and conditions to share our lands. For First

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Peoples these rights are spelled out in Section 23 of Canada's constitution. Even before the Canadian constitution it is important for people to understand that Indigenous peoples always had not only people centered economies but ones that lived within natural laws and respect for nature. It is good that other people are starting to share the value and importance in such simple and sustainable concepts. As people recently removed from the land, we welcome partnerships that promote sustainable development, as we believe the current development process has become irrelevant, costly and hugely unsustainable. As Indigenous Peoples struggle with the shackles of colonialism it is important to draw on the strength and wisdom of ancient values, wisdom, and knowledge to create strong and vibrant communities, we ask you to share with us in that collective process. As though he had sat around a campfire and listened to the wisdom of my ancestors, my colleague Dr. David Korten author of several books on social economies has stated, "Humanity's collective demand on the regenerative capacity of Earth's ecosystem grew to exceed the limit of what can be sustained. To create a world that works for all, public policy must give priority not to aggregate growth, but to using the resources of planet and society equitably and sustainably to provide healthy, fulfilling lives for all people and other living beings. It means reorganizing economic life to produce more of the things that people need — like food, shelter, clothing, education, and health care — and less of the costly things we do not — like military hardware, pollution, traffic jams, and white-collared crime. Hope for the human future rests, therefore, not with institutions of power, but with the millions of individuals like you who have gathered here, to see solutions to the reality of our collective crisis".

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Thank you all my relations for sharing commonalities, in closing, I quote from the 2000 Earth Charter and great Dakota visionary Chief Sitting Bull.

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Let us put our minds together and see what future we can make for our children.

-The Earth Charter (2000)