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THE WORLD ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS AND NCAI'S ROLE (Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada July 17 - July 22 1982)

A Report to the Executive Board Submitted by Joseph DeLaCruz, President; Ralph Eluska, First Vice President and Senior International Representative

At the 1981 NCAI National Convention in Anchorage, Alaska the General Assembly adopted a resolution which extended NCAI's support to the World Assembly of First Nations as originally sponsored by the Federal of Saskatchewan Indians (FSI) (Canada). Subsequent to the adoption of this resolution the President authorized the initialling of a "Protocol Agreement" between NCAI and FSI wherein it was agreed that NCAI would accept the role of "Co-Sponsor of the four-day conference. Other national Indian organizations from Canada and the U.S. had agreed to co-sponsor the meeting. These included the Assembly of First Nations of Canada (formerly the National Indian Brotherhood), the Circumpolar Committee on National Issues, the National Tribal Chairman's Association and the FSI. The Native Council of Canada (NCC) had originally decided to boycott the conference but later decided to co-sponsor. The World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) had decided not to assume a formal role and the Inuit Circumpolar Conference had decided not to officially co-sponsor. Our role in the organization of the World Assembly was to participate in several planning meetings and later co-chair the General Assembly Sessions and co-chair the Politics and Law Conference. It was understood that NCAI would not be responsible for raising funds for the Assembly.

Between October 1981 and May 1982 several misunderstandings began to develop between the principle organizers of the Assembly (FSI) and the NCAI.

1. FSI was strongly promoting the idea that the WAFN should become a permanent world organization separate from the already existing World Council of Indigenous Peoples. (NCAI's policy on this question was "opposition to a permanent WAFN and full and unqualified support for the WCIP.
2. The WAFN meeting in Regina, Saskatchewan was being promoted by FSI as a meeting where a series of bi-lateral and multi-lateral agree-

ments would be signed between tribes in Canada and tribes in the United States. (NCAI's policy on this matter was that bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements could not be formally adopted by the WAFN because it lacked a formal standing among tribes in North America and participants in the General Assembly were not accredited with credentials to officially represent their respective Indian governments.

3. The Political and Legal Conference which NCAI was supposed to co-chair was organized to discuss matters which would be counterproductive in terms of improving North American Indian political development.
4. It had become apparent that the organizers of the WAFN were engaged in a political controversy with other Indian organizations in Canada over the Canadian Constitution. These controversies threatened to engulf NCAI threatening good relations between NCAI and the leading Indian organizations in Canada. When NCAI adopted its support resolution we were then unaware of these political difficulties.

Attending the World Assembly from NCAI were President DeLaCruz, First Vice President Ralph Eluska, Treasurer Hollis Stabler Jr., Rudy Ryser as international advisor and press secretary, and Eleanor Menzies serving as assistant advisor and assistant press secretary. We had established the following goals for NCAI participation in the World Assembly:

Reorganize the Political Legal Conference to focus on North American discussions of the Draft International Covenant on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (which originated with the WCIP in Canberra, Australia in the Spring of 1981 chaired by Ralph Eluska.

Organize a meeting of the principle National Indian Organization Leaders to consider the formation of the North American Indigenous Regional Council as a part of the WCIP structure.

Meet with WCIP Executive Council Members to discuss the recently transmitted NCAI Indian Crisis in Central America Resolution

Meet with the principle Indian leaders of Canada and reaffirm our support to them in their struggle against Canada and Britain.

Meet with WCIP regional representatives and make arrangements to improve communications and technical support through the WCIP.

Halt all efforts to establish a new international organization separate from the World Council of Indigenous Peoples.

All of these goals are consistent with the mandates established by the NCAI "Tribal/Global Relations: Policy & Action Plan for the 80s" adopted by the 37th Annual NCAI Convention October 28, 1980.

President DeLaCruz, Vice President Eluska and Treasurer Stabler participated in a day-long North American Leadership Conference on June 18 to discuss the formation of the North American Indigenous Regional Council. President DeLaCruz led the NCAI delegation for the initial discussions. Vice President Eluska, serving as the North American

Representative to the WCIP Executive Council and NCAI Senior International Representative conducted a series of subsequent workgroup meetings over three evenings to arrange final agreement between the leaders of the Native Council of Canada, Assembly of First Nations, NCAI and NTCA to initial a resolution formally agreeing to Charter the North American Indigenous Regional Council. The regional mechanism will be formally known as the North American Assembly of First Nations. It will serve as the regional link between Indian Governments and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. All four organizations are now committed to formally establishing the regional council.

President DeLaCruz chaired four full sessions of the Politics and Law Conference on July 20 - 21. The consensus of all of the principles and participants was that the Draft International Covenant on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples document (proposed as new international legislation) "fundamentally addresses the rights and interests of Indian peoples in North America". It was understood that the document must be discussed more thoroughly by the various national organizations from North America and within Indian communities throughout North America before it is finally adopted by the WCIP at its fourth General Assembly in Mexico (1984).

Treasurer Stabler delivered presentations before the Economic Conference and participated in the final communique released at the end of the conference. Stabler urged increased use of telecommunications by Indian tribes and discussed the need for an Indian development bank.

The NCAI Delegation met with the WCIP Executive Council regarding the NCAI Indian Crisis in Central America Resolution and directly facilitated the establishment of an agreement within the WCIP to improve worldwide technical support for the organization and its members.

As a result of intensive meetings throughout the five days with representatives of FSI, WCIP and leaders from NCC, Assembly of First Nations and NTCA the NCAI Delegation arranged full agreement between all parties to fully support the WCIP and set aside the question of WAFN permanence.

The NCAI Delegation met extensively with Canadian Indian Leaders to reassure them of NCAI support. The bond of mutual cooperation and understanding was successfully reaffirmed.

Finally:

The NCAI Delegation was able to achieve all of the goals originally laid out. NCAI and its member tribes can expect greater support and understanding from Indian leaders in Canada and other indigenous leaders throughout the Western Hemisphere. This support will become increasingly important as the NCAI increasingly deals with the policies of the Reagan Administration. The network of support between indigenous peoples around the world and NCAI has been strengthened to our benefit as well as the benefit to our indigenous friends around the world.