



## INTERNATIONAL INDIAN TREATY COUNCIL

2390 Mission St., Suite 301  
San Francisco, CA. 94110

Telephone (415) 641-4482  
Fax (415) 641-1298

email: [alberto@treatycouncil.org](mailto:alberto@treatycouncil.org); [iitc@treatycouncil.org](mailto:iitc@treatycouncil.org)



United Nations Commission on Human Rights

Friday, 1 April 2005

(Sixty-first session, 14 March – 22 April 2005)

Agenda Item 11: Civil and political rights, including the questions of:

(b) Religious intolerance:

Written intervention submitted by the International Indian Treaty Council on the New Restrictions of Religious Practices in US State and Federal Prisons

Read by Lenny Foster, IITC Board Member (Dine)

The American Indian prisoners in the United States Prison System are facing new restrictive policies on their religious and spiritual practices that make healing and rehabilitation in the traditional manner virtually impossible.

These new restrictions include: a) four hour time limit on the sweat lodge ceremony that includes the heating of the stones, which takes two hours and two hours for the actual ceremony, rushing through an ancient old ceremony is not proper because the ceremony is very sacred. The deliberate attempt to shorten the hours and circumvent the ceremony is sacrilegious and undermining the seriousness and sacredness of the spiritual healing and blessings;

b) supervision of the sweat lodge by the Chaplain is not necessary because it takes away time from other spiritual and cultural activities such as the Talking Circle, Drumming sessions and Pipe Ceremonies that also mandates the presence of the Chaplain;

c) Rationing of the firewood has deliberately undermined the heating of the stones because the stones need to be heated for at least two hours or else the stones are cold and the Sweat Lodge is not complete and/or beneficial to the healing and prayers;

d) Mandating the English only requirement for the ceremony is discrimination and racist because the Native language is used and needed for the songs and prayers to be blessed by the Creator.

When the traditional ceremonies are held in the ancient and sacred way and manner the Native prisoners receive the beneficial rehabilitation and spiritual healing. The Sweat Lodge ceremony has been the foundation of the healing and recovery from alcohol and drugs and it has been a very positive therapy for the Native prisoners. All the traditional practices and beliefs are very important for the rehabilitation and recovery or the experience of incarceration becomes nothing more than warehousing human beings.

Leonard Peltier, who has been incarcerated in the United States Penitentiary – Leavenworth, Kansas for twenty-eight years is a traditional practitioner of these practices and beliefs and is a beneficiary of this religious freedom struggle.

All American Indian Nations and Spiritual Leaders need to be consulted to rectify these new policies. To deny these basic human rights and show indifference to a dignified spiritual healing is tantamount to a cultural genocide of a young generation of American Indian prisoners.

Thank you.