

**COMMITTEE FOR THE ELIMINATION
OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION**

Sixty- eighth session

Geneva, 20 February – 10 March 2006

EARLY WARNING AND URGENT ACTION PROCEDURE

DECISION 1 (68)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A. Introduction

1. At its 67th session held from 2 to 19 August 2005, the Committee considered on a preliminary basis requests submitted by the Western Shoshone National Council, the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe, the Winnemucca Indian Colony and the Yomba Shoshone Tribe, asking the Committee to act under its early warning and urgent action procedure on the situation of the Western Shoshone indigenous peoples in the United States of America.

2. Considering that the opening of a dialogue with the State party would assist in clarifying the situation before the submission and examination of the fourth and fifth periodic reports of the United States of America, due on 20 November 2003, the Committee, in accordance with article 9 (1) of the Convention and article 65 of its rules of procedure, invited the State party, in a letter dated 19 August 2005, to respond to a list of questions, with a view to considering this issue at its 68th session.

3. Responding to the Committee's letter, the State party, in its letter dated 15 February 2006, stated that its overdue periodic reports are being prepared and that they will include responses to the list of issues. The Committee regrets that the State party has not undertaken to submit its periodic reports by a specific date, that it has not provided responses to the list of issues by 31 December 2005 as requested, and that it did not consider it necessary to appear before the Committee to discuss the matter.

4. The Committee has received credible information alleging that the Western Shoshone indigenous peoples are being denied their traditional rights to land, and that measures taken and even accelerated lately by the State party in relation to the status, use and occupation of these lands may cumulatively lead to irreparable harm to these communities. In light of such information, and in the absence of any response from the State party, the Committee decided at its 68th session to adopt the present decision under its early warning and urgent action procedure. This procedure is clearly distinct from the communication procedure under article 14 of the Convention. Furthermore, the nature and urgency of the issue examined in this decision go well beyond the limits of the communication procedure.

B. Concerns

5. The Committee expresses concern about the lack of action taken by the State party to follow up on its previous concluding observations, in relation to the situation of the Western Shoshone peoples (A/56/18, para. 400, adopted on 13 August 2001). Although these are indeed long-standing issues, as stressed by the State party in its letter, they warrant immediate and effective action from the State party. The Committee therefore considers that this issue should be dealt with as a matter of priority.

6. The Committee is concerned by the State party's position that Western Shoshone peoples' legal rights to ancestral lands have been extinguished through gradual encroachment, notwithstanding the fact that the Western Shoshone peoples have reportedly continued to use and occupy the lands and their natural resources in accordance with their traditional land tenure patterns. The Committee further notes with concern that the State party's position is made on the basis of processes before the Indian Claims Commission, "which did not comply with contemporary international human rights norms, principles and standards that govern determination of indigenous property interests", as stressed by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in the case *Mary and Carrie Dann versus United States* (Case 11.140, 27 December 2002).

7. The Committee is of the view that past and new actions taken by the State party on Western Shoshone ancestral lands lead to a situation where, today, the obligations of the State party under the Convention are not respected, in particular the obligation to guarantee the right of everyone to equality before the law in the enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, without discrimination based on race, colour, or national or ethnic origin. The Committee recalls its General recommendation 23 (1997) on the rights of indigenous peoples, in particular their right to own, develop, control and use their communal lands, territories and resources, and expresses particular concern about:

- a) Reported legislative efforts to privatize Western Shoshone ancestral lands for transfer to multinational extractive industries and energy developers.
- b) Information according to which destructive activities are conducted and/or planned on areas of spiritual and cultural significance to the Western Shoshone peoples, who are denied access to, and use of, such areas. It notes in particular the reinvigorated federal efforts to open a nuclear waste repository at the Yucca Mountain; the alleged use of explosives and open pit gold mining activities on Mont Tenabo and Horse Canyon; and the alleged issuance of geothermal energy leases at, or near, hot springs, and the processing of further applications to that end.
- c) The reported resumption of underground nuclear testing on Western Shoshone ancestral lands;
- d) The conduct and / or planning of all such activities without consultation with and despite protests of the Western Shoshone peoples;

- e) The reported intimidation and harassment of Western Shoshone people by the State party's authorities, through the imposition of grazing fees, trespass and collection notices, impounding of horse and livestock, restrictions on hunting, fishing and gathering, as well as arrests, which gravely disturb the enjoyment of their ancestral lands.
- f) The difficulties encountered by Western Shoshone peoples in appropriately challenging all such actions before national courts and in obtaining adjudication on the merits of their claims, due in particular to domestic technicalities.

C. Recommendations

8. The Committee recommends to the State party that it respect and protect the human rights of the Western Shoshone peoples, without discrimination based on race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, in accordance with the Convention. The State party is urged to pay particular attention to the right to health and cultural rights of the Western Shoshone people, which may be infringed upon by activities threatening their environment and/or disregarding the spiritual and cultural significance they give to their ancestral lands.

9. The Committee urges the State party to take immediate action to initiate a dialogue with the representatives of the Western Shoshone peoples in order to find a solution acceptable to them, and which complies with their rights under, in particular, articles 5 and 6 of the Convention. In this regard also, the Committee draws the attention of the State party to its General recommendation 23 (1997) on the rights of indigenous peoples, in particular their right to own, develop, control and use their communal lands, territories and resources.

10. The Committee urges the State party to adopt the following measures until a final decision or settlement is reached on the status, use and occupation of Western Shoshone ancestral lands in accordance with due process of law and the State party's obligations under the Convention:

- a) Freeze any plan to privatize Western Shoshone ancestral lands for transfer to multinational extractive industries and energy developers;
- b) Desist from all activities planned and/or conducted on the ancestral lands of Western Shoshone or in relation to their natural resources, which are being carried out without consultation with and despite protests of the Western Shoshone peoples;
- c) Stop imposing grazing fees, trespass and collection notices, horse and livestock impoundments, restrictions on hunting, fishing and gathering, as well as arrests, and rescind all notices already made to that end, inflicted on Western Shoshone people while using their ancestral lands.

11. In accordance with article 9 (1) of the Convention, the Committee requests that the State party provide it with information on action taken to implement the present decision by 15 July 2006.