

**Statement of Kee Watchman (Dineh/Navajo) at the 59th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in 2003 in Geneva as a member of IITC's (International Indian Treaty Council) delegation**

*Mr. Kee Watchman, Dineh (Navajo) elder and spokesperson for the traditional Dineh Cactus Valley/Red Willow Springs Sovereign Community of Big Mountain, Arizona, United States asked that the following statement be presented by the IITC to the members of this Commission concerning the devastating social, cultural, environmental and spiritual impacts of continue coal mining on his Peoples' traditional lands and water:*

"We, the traditional Dineh people, are still holding on very strongly to our religious rights on our ancestral homeland. Everything on this Land is connected to our prayers, our songs, and our culture. So we are very strongly protecting our Land because the energy company, Peabody Coal Company, as well as the U.S. government, the Navajo and Hopi Tribal governments, and the BIA are looking at this land - Cactus Valley/Red Willow Springs Sovereign Community/ Big Mountain are to be strip mined in the next 2-10 years.

"We have only a very small piece of our Land left. This Land has a lot of things that are still here with us as part of our traditional way of life: ceremonial herbs, the different colors of rocks/stones used for ceremonial sand painting, sacred springs that are used for ceremonials, and also our shrines, offering places, and burial sites. Many of the elderly still follow our religion and pass it on to the young generation.

"After Peabody Coal Company destroyed those places and those things by putting up the strip mine, every one of those medicine people who lived there lost their lives because their prayers and songs and the place where they connected with the Spirits was destroyed. This is what we have seen. This is why we need the Land to be protected under the International Human Rights and Religious Freedom laws. We need to ask the International Body to do more research and take strong action on our concerns.

"In our religion we have our songs and prayers about the rain and the water and the Mother Earth, to use in the ceremonials. We feel like our prayers and our songs have all been wasted by the strip mining, drained with the liver (coal) of the Mother Earth over 287 miles away by coal slurry line. The power from this coal is used by millions of people in the big city.

"However, our Grandfathers and Grandmothers are still holding a bundle to pray for the water to return, and to bring back a good rain and a good snow for the Land, for the people who remain on the Land, for their grandchildren and the animals.

"Our Grandmother said, "the Mother Earth needs healing. Black Mesa needs to be healed, because she had a big surgery. Her liver (coal) and other things have been taken out. This is why we, the Grandmothers, can't heal ourselves even if we try to pray." This is what our Grandmother used to say, Roberta Blackgoat. Even though she left us for another spirit world we still respect her words and keep it alive on these sacred lands."