

SOVEREIGNTY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Seventh Tribal Sovereignty Symposium

January 27, 2006

THE PRESIDENT'S WELCOME ADDRESS

REV. MONSIGNOR FRANKLYN M. CASALE*

Your Excellency, Premier Okalik, Honorable Chairman Cypress, Honorable Keller George, Ms. Carrie Dann, Other Distinguished Indigenous Leaders, Government Officials, Scholars, Faculty, Administration, Students and Friends: It is my pleasure to welcome you and, in many cases, to welcome you back to St. Thomas University School of Law.

This is a special moment for me since I was present at the creation of this unique event back in 1994, and I have had the pleasure of welcoming the participants in every symposium since then. This is the seventh symposium in a series in which we have dealt with diverse and emerging issues such as The Church and Native America, The Miami Circle, The Protection of the Everglades, Health and Social Issues in Indian Country, American Indian Treaties, and the Protection of Sacred Sites.

I would like to thank the steering committee under the leadership of Professor Siegfried Wiessner, Kirke Kickingbird, and Roza Pati for organizing this event. We owe a particular debt of gratitude to Sandy Batchelor and the Batchelor Foundation who have

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continuously, and generously, supported this event throughout years.

As in 1994, St. Thomas University maintains a fervent commitment to the cause of Native Americans and other indigenous peoples who have suffered the effects of conquest and colonization. For example, we are supporting the Miccosukee struggle to restore and protect their home in the Everglades. Chairman Cypress rang the warning bells in the 1990s, when he said, in testimony before Congress: "The Everglades is our mother, and she is dying."

The goal is to preserve this fragile environment, despite all the conflicting interests involved. Today, for example, our University's own Professor Light is at the Everglades Coalition meeting on Hutchinson Island as part of the University's commitment and a grant that we received from the Environmental Protection Agency to study public participation in Everglades Restoration.

As part of a broad coalition effort, the Miami Circle has been preserved as the first indigenous sacred site protected by exercise of the Government's power of eminent domain. We feel very proud to have participated, and I thank Professor Wiessner for his hard work on that.

Customary international law rights of indigenous peoples to their traditional lands, a topic mostly developed by Professor Wiessner, have been successfully claimed. The Western Shoshone lands are one example. We welcome Carrie Dann, the lead claimant in the ongoing Western Shoshone land litigation and her valiant attorney, Julie Fishel, and we look forward to their testimony and analysis this afternoon.

As a distinctly Catholic university, we are devoted to the ideal of social justice for all peoples. We are committed to fighting with you for our shared ideals of non-discrimination, cultural preservation, and self-determination and have gathered together for this symposium, the top leaders and thinkers on tribal sovereignty.

Chairman Cypress, The Honorable Keller George, and Kirke Kickingbird, who have been pillars of this symposium for many years, will share their views with you, as will Mr. Middleton,

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Director of the U.S. Government's Office on Indian Energy and Economic Development. We look forward to hearing from them as well as from Professor Pouncy.

Ultimately, true self-determination requires a measure of autonomy, of self-government. It is important to reflect continuously about the indigenous concepts of government, autonomy, and tribal sovereignty. An example of the farthest reaching success, of the reclaiming of sovereign powers by indigenous nations is the Inuit territory of Canada, Nunavut, split from of the Northwest Territories in 1999. We are delighted to have with us its Premier, The Honorable Paul Okalik.

May God shine His blessings on this meeting and everybody assembled in this room. Thank you.