

HAUDENOSAUNEE

STATEMENT TO THE WORLD—MAY 1979

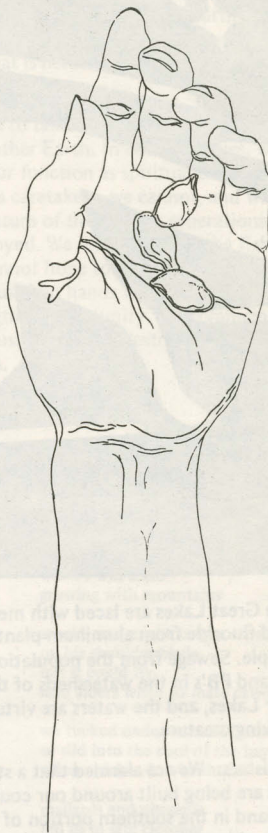
(The following statement was passed in the Six Nations Council on April 29, 1979, as the beginning of an environmental statement of the Hau de no sau nee. It was first printed in AKWESASNE NOTES, Spring 1979 issue. They have asked that other publications and interested groups give this statement the widest circulation possible.)

The Haudenosaunee, or Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy, is among the most ancient continuously operating governments in the world. Long before the arrival of the European peoples in North America, our peoples met in council to enact the principles of peaceful coexistence among nations and the recognition of the rights of peoples to a continued and uninterrupted existence. European people left our council fires and journeyed forth into the world to spread principles of justice and democracy which they learned from us and which have had profound effects upon the evolution of the Modern World.

This Spring marks the bicentennial of the Clinton-Sullivan Campaign, an invasion of our territories during the American Revolution which was intended to destroy the Haudenosaunee as a people. In their wake, the American armies left a "scorched earth" path of frenzied destruction through our lands, leaving behind only ashes as they retreated from our territories. So fierce and malevolent was this action, that they ravaged cornfields, girdled fruit orchards, tortured and murdered Native women, and killed every living thing in their path.

It was the intention of the U.S. armies in 1779 that the Haudenosaunee be destroyed to the last man, woman and child. To that end, they waged war against our civilian populations, and it is clear in our minds that they were interested not merely in our political and military defeat, but would rest at nothing short of the total annihilation of all that exists of the Hau de no sau nee. We have survived that attack, and many more since then, but now we are seriously alarmed at the events which have taken place over these two hundred years.

Brothers and Sisters: When the Europeans first invaded our lands, they found a world filled with the bountiful gifts of the Creation. Even the soldiers in General Sullivan's army were awed by the country they had entered, a land where a man could walk all day without seeing the sky, so rich and healthy was our forest. It was a land where the nearest branch of the trees stood fifty feet from the ground, and the trees were so great that three men holding hands could not embrace them. Sullivan's soldiers' words record what we would have told you—that the rivers ran so thick with fish that sometimes even in wide streams a man could not see the bottom.



Everywhere the game was plentiful, and sometimes the birds darkened the sky like great clouds, so great were their numbers. Our country teemed with elk and deer, bear and moose, and we were a happy and prosperous people in those times.

Brothers and Sisters: Our Mother the Earth is growing old now. No longer does she support upon her breast the teeming herds of wildlife who once shared this place with us, and most of the great forest which is our home is gone today. The forests were butchered a century ago to make charcoal for the forges of the Industrial Revolution, most of the game was destroyed by sport hunters and farmers, most of the bird life has been destroyed by hunters and the pesticides which are common this century. Many of the rivers flow thick with the effluence of great population centers throughout our country. We see that the "scorched earth" policy has not ended.



The fish of the Great Lakes are laced with mercury from industrial plants, and fluoride from aluminum plants poisons the land and the people. Sewage from the population centers is mixed with PCB's and PB's in the watersheds of the Great Lakes and the Finger Lakes, and the waters are virtually nowhere safe for any living creature.

Brothers and Sisters: We are alarmed that a string of nuclear power plants are being built around our country and that at Three Mile Island in the southern portion of our ancient territories an "accident" has occurred which is of a type of accident which could hasten the end of life in this place. We are dismayed that a nuclear waste dump at West Valley (N.Y.) upstream from one of our communities is releasing radioactive substances through our lands and into the watershed of Lake Erie. We are offended that the information about the nature of these plants is known only to the highest officials of the United States, leaving the people unarmed to defend themselves from such development, and that the development of nuclear power is encouraged to continue.

We are seriously concerned for the well-being and continued survival of our brothers and sisters in the Southwest and Northwest who are exposed to uranium mining and its inherent dangers. The mining end is the dirtiest portion of the nuclear fuel cycle and has progressed beyond questions of whether or not the machinery involved is dependable. Already vast amounts of low-level radioactive uranium tailings have been dumped in cities and used in the building materials of dwellings and public buildings over a wide area of the Southwest. People have died, and many more can be expected to die.

Proponents of the Nuclear Fuel Cycle issue statement after statement to the people, urging that the nuclear reactors are fitted with safety devices so sophisticated that a melt-down is only the most remote of possibilities. Yet we observe that no machinery or other invention made by human hands was a permanent thing. Nothing humans ever built, not even the Pyramids of Egypt, maintained their purpose indefinitely. The only universal truth applicable to human-made devices is that all of them fail in their turn. Nuclear reactors must also fall victim to that truth.

Brothers and Sisters: We cannot adequately express our feelings of horror and repulsion as we view the policies of industry and government in North America which threaten to destroy all life. Our forefathers predicted that the European Way of Life would bring a Spiritual imbalance to the world, that the Earth would grow old as a result of that imbalance. Now it is before all the world to see—that the life-producing forces are being reversed, and that the life-potential is leaving this land. Only a people whose minds are twisted beyond an ability to perceive truth could act in ways which will threaten the future generations of humanity.

Brothers and Sisters: We are alarmed at the evidence that is before us. The smoke from the industrial centers in the Midwest and around the Great Lakes rises in a deadly cloud and returns to earth in the form of acid rains over the Adirondack Mountains, and the fish life cannot reproduce in the acid waters. In the high country of the Adirondack Mountains, the lakes are still, the fish are no more.

The people who plant the lands that we have occupied for thousands of years display no love for the life of this place. Each year they plant the same crops on the same land and they must then spray those crops with poisons to kill the insects which naturally infest their fields because they do not rotate crops or allow the land to rest. Their pesticides kill the birdlife, and the runoff poisons the surface waters.

They must spray also the other plant life with herbicides, and each year the runoff from the fields carries these poisons into the watersheds of our country and into the waters of the world.

Brothers and Sisters: Our ancient homeland is spotted today with an array of chemical dumps. Along the Niagara River dioxin, a particularly deadly substance, threatens the remaining life there and in the waters which flow from there. Forestry departments spray the surviving forests with powerful insecticides to encourage tourism by people seeking a few days or weeks away from the cities where the air hangs heavy with sulphur and carbon oxides. The insecticides kill the black flies, but also destroy much of the food chain for the bird, fish and animal life which also inhabit those regions.

Brothers and Sisters: We point out to you the Spiritual Path of Righteousness and Reason. We bring to your thoughts and minds that right-minded human beings seek to promote above all else the life of all things. We direct to your minds that peace is not merely the absence of war, but the constant effort to maintain harmonious existence between peoples, from individual to individual and between humans and the other beings of this planet. We point out to you that a Spiritual Consciousness is the Path to Survival of Humankind. We who walk about on Mother Earth occupy this place for only a short time. It is our duty as human beings to preserve the life that is here for the benefit of the generations yet unborn.

Brothers and Sisters: The Haudenosaunee are determined to take whatever actions we can to halt the destruction of Mother Earth. In our territories, we continue to carry out our function as spiritual caretakers of the land. In this role as caretakers, we cannot, and will not, stand idly by while the future of the coming generations is being systematically destroyed. We recognize that the fight is a long one, and that we cannot hope to win it alone. To win, to secure the future, we must join hands with like minded people and create a strength through unity. We commemorate two hundred years of injustice and the destruction of the world with these words.

R

From BLACKROBE: ISAAC JOGUES (1604-1646)

WOLF 1

The trampled forest
reverberates
the crunch
of heavy
footsteps

*Kwa-ah, kwa-ah!**

WOLF 2

Snakes

Like the wind of a river
it weaves south from the snow
country leveling the woods,
swallowing all the rabbits
in the brush, trampling
the young berries. Its
silver skin defies the moon.

Tight ribbon of cold flesh
ever slithering north, a great
sturgeon in its jaw, its belly
obese with the hind-quarters
of a spring fawn. The golden stripes,
brilliant, flaunt the sun.

WOLF 3

Feet
in the forest
under eagles

separates
birch and elm

kwa-ah

reflections
break the
sunlight

kwa-ah

BIRDS

birds weren't caged
when I was a kid
growing with mountains

an old man might keep a crow
on his shoulder-blade
but it could fly
into alders when its mate cawed

we tucked under current bushes
or slid into the cool of the hay barn
when chicken-hawks shadowed the yard

mallards and pheasants
fed us in late October
but my dad left a few
to hatch spring

kids threw rocks
at sparrows and starlings,
we hunted hummingbirds
but those home-made sling-shots
never aimed right
and did you every try
to catch a hummingbird
in your open hands,
or bury a robin
in a kitchen match box

POEMS BY Maurice Kenny

*Mohawk: A sad wail.