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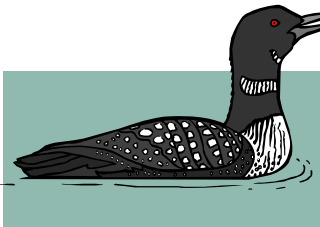
**ALTERNATIVES TO DEVELOPMENT:  
ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES OF  
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

In the original religions of many indigenous peoples there is the belief that human beings are thinking, acting and growing individuals with souls or spirits. This belief also applies to animals and plants, which live and grow, and may have influence upon our daily lives. Even the different phenomena in nature, the sun and moon which run from east to west, sunbeams which give warmth and growth, water which gives life, rivers which run, snow which comes and disappears again, volcanoes, dangerous and noisy lightning and more, were for our ancestors, and many of us still, the natural world. This world exists as a balance between natural and supernatural forces. Nature is a real environment that one must accept. Through experience and through different rituals, indigenous peoples have learned to live in harmony with nature.

Not until the intervention of European political states was the harmony between human beings and nature upset. The balance between the natural and supernatural was, and continues to be, violently disrupted by those who would seek short term benefits by extracting natural resources at rates, and in amounts, greater than can be naturally replaced. Political states have grown so rapidly in the past two hundred years that they now consume resources in excess of their own ability to produce them. The demand for consumable resources has increased so rapidly that shortages have multiplied to the extent that basic natural resources like water, petroleum and timber are increasingly difficult to secure.

The motivating force behind the misuse of natural resources is growth of consumption and the idea of progress. Because native peoples live in close proximity to the natural world and the supernatural world, a relative balance is maintained through limited growth and moderate consumption. Life could not be sustained without limits and moderation. Even political states recognize that limits must be placed on the consumption of natural resources when there are shortages, but instead of cutting back expectations and reducing the long-term use of certain resources, new goals are set for exploration and exploitation. Such new demands place new pressures on the fragile ecology and threaten the long-term future of humankind.

# Teacher Notes: Aboriginal Perspectives on the Land



The needs and interests of political states and indigenous groups are in many ways diametrically opposed to one another. Political states view uncontrolled growth and progress as the highest ideals, while indigenous groups regard balance and limited growth as essential to their livelihood. From all appearances these ideas cannot be reconciled. We must

reconcile the differences or a great deal of humankind will not survive. There is more to bind humankind together than should separate. There is a common belief in the human potential and a common belief that human beings should determine their own future. There is the common belief that human beings should be free and that the rights of a people should be respected. We also have in common the belief that the world should have a new economic order, which ensures the health and future of all peoples. In order to maximize human commonalities we must be willing to accept compromises and lower our expectations. We must agree that a new economic order must provide for all of humanity and not merely for a few. We must recognize that a new economic order cannot benefit all of human kind if it permits exploitation of one group by another group. A new economic order must mean the protection and preservation of nature and a restored balance. We have several proposals, which we believe will increase the likelihood that a new international order will benefit humankind. We propose that:

- Industrial states must not compete with tribal groups for their resources. Indigenous resources must be used only with the clear consent of the groups affected.
- Industrial states must institute new policies, which require a substantial reduction in the use of timber, petroleum, water and all other raw materials.
- The responsibility for initiating outside contacts between indigenous peoples and political states must rest with the tribal peoples themselves.
- National governments and international organizations must recognize and support tribal rights to their traditional land, cultural autonomy, and full local sovereignty.



# Teacher Notes: Aboriginal Perspectives on the Land



- The United Nations should, with the concurrence of affected indigenous peoples, declare internationally protected "autonomous indigenous areas" secured by aboriginal title and established to preserve and protect the right of self-determination for indigenous peoples, and protect natural resources from external exploitation and encroachment without the consent of local indigenous populations and international supervision.
- The United Nations must establish an international organization, which includes membership from the political states and indigenous peoples for the purpose of reviewing grievances and claims proclaimed by indigenous peoples, and such an organization must be empowered to address the U.N. Security Council and U.N. General Assembly to promote redress of authenticated grievances.
- The United Nations must establish an international organization which includes membership from the political states and indigenous peoples for the purpose of offering financial aid and technical assistance to indigenous peoples when they initiate a request, and such a financial and technical aid organization should be empowered to secure such financial commitments from other world organizations and political states as may be necessary to the needs of indigenous peoples.

Change in the lives of indigenous peoples is a condition, which has always existed. Serious changes have given rise to serious re-adaptations to the new condition. Indigenous peoples represent many peoples, many cultures and different ways of thinking. But, they share the same natural world and the same spiritual world. As we close this presentation, we cannot help but observe that industrial political states have risen and seem to be in decline since their emergence just over two hundred years ago. Tribal societies have existed for over 10,000 years and continue to adapt and adjust. Which is the better way, growth and consumption or balance?

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**Source:**

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