

UNITED STATES: Recognizing First Peoples, Past Wrongs, and UNDRIP – But Action Needed to Match Words

In 1996, after years of government inaction and mismanagement, Elouise Cobell (Blackfeet Tribe, Montana) filed suit on behalf of her people against the U.S. government for withholding royalties from mineral and oil extraction on Indian lands. This spurred a contentious and polarizing 14-year class action suit that was finally resolved in December 2010. The Claims Resolution Act was signed into law, appropriating US\$1.9 billion to address the original claims as well as more than US\$1 billion in water industry revenues.

Despite these historic settlements, change continues to be both hard-fought and hard to come by. In 2010 there was pushback across Indian Country: men, women, and youth protested the continued use of Indian identity as mascots in Colorado, Wisconsin, and Oregon; elders worked to perpetuate languages on the brink of extinction in Alaska; and 300+ American Indian communities continued to petition for federal recognition.

Also in 2010, after decades of Indigenous political mobilization, the U.S. government finally endorsed UNDRIP and promised implementation—following Canada and New Zealand, which also endorsed UNDRIP in 2010. When making this historic and highly significant commitment, President Barack Obama remarked that, “the aspirations [the declaration] affirms—including the respect for the institutions and rich cultures of Native Peoples—are ones we must always seek to fulfill... what matters far more than words—what matters far more than any resolution or declaration—are actions to match those words.”

Click [here](#) for the full report "PUSHBACK: Local Power, Global Realignment," which takes stock of the current status of forest rights and tenure globally, assesses the key issues and events of 2010 that shape possibilities to improve local rights and livelihoods, and identifies key questions and challenges that the world will face in 2011.