



Terry Rambler
Chairman

SAN CARLOS APACHE TRIBE

P.O. Box 0, San Carlos, Arizona 85550
Phone (928) 475-1600 ❖ Fax (928) 475-2567

Tao Etpison
Vice-Chairman

On Oak Flat, an Indigenous Sacred Site, Soon to be Destroyed By Multinational Mining Interests

**Terry Rambler, Chairman, San Carlos Apache Tribe
United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Twenty-Second Session**

**Item 3 Special Theme of Session
Indigenous Peoples, Human Health, Planetary and
Territorial Health and Climate Change: A Rights-Based
Approach**

April 18, 2023

My name is Terry Rambler. As the Chairman of the San Carlos Apache Tribe, I am here to bring the Forum's attention to a major human rights violation - the destruction of sacred sites.

Written Statement for UNPFII

Re: Protection of Oak Flat

April 18, 2023

Page 2 of 5

Indigenous Peoples' spiritual well-being and relationship with the environment must be protected as a matter of health. We appreciate the Permanent Forum's studies on "Indigenous Determinants of Health in the 2030 Agenda," and "Free, Prior, and Informed Consent."

The United States plans to give Chi'chil Bildagoteel, known as Oak Flat, to Resolution Copper, LLC, a joint venture of two mining giants, Rio Tinto and BHP, who seeks to destroy Oak Flat, the foundation of our Apache religious beliefs – to develop one of the largest copper mines in North America.

Oak Flat is a holy site, an area of irreplaceable beauty akin to a church, no different than the Wailing Wall, Temple Mount,

Written Statement for UNPFII

Re: Protection of Oak Flat

April 18, 2023

Page 3 of 5

Australia's Juukan Gorge, or Mecca's Kaaba. Apache people have lived, prayed, and died at Oak Flat from time immemorial.

It is an area filled with power – a place where Apaches go to pray; to collect traditional foods, such as acorn and medicinal plants; conduct ceremonies such as the Holy Ground and the Sunrise Dance that celebrates a young woman's coming of age; gather medicines and ceremonial items; and seek and obtain peace and personal cleansing.

In 2014, the U.S. Congress passed a rider in a large defense bill to give Oak Flat to Resolution Copper, which intends to mine 1.5 miles beneath Oak Flat, resulting in a crater of 2 miles wide

Written Statement for UNPFII

Re: Protection of Oak Flat

April 18, 2023

Page 4 of 5

and 1,000 feet deep, obliterating Oak Flat. Once Rio Tinto and BHP take what they want, we will be left with a massive environmental disaster.

Every person, by virtue of being human, has the right to practice their religion. By violating the rights of Apaches to practice our religion and maintain our spiritual health and well-being, the United States is failing to comply with international standards incumbent on them as signatories of treaties and declarations that protect these fundamental human rights.

I request the United Nations Permanent Forum call on all States to affirmatively protect Indigenous Peoples' sacred sites under the mandate of culture, environment, health, and human

Written Statement for UNPFII

Re: Protection of Oak Flat

April 18, 2023

Page 5 of 5

rights. I also welcome and encourage this body to visit Oak Flat to learn of the significance of this beautiful and holy site to our health as Indigenous Peoples.

As we say in our Apache language, Ahi'yi'é (thank you) for the opportunity to bring this matter to your attention.