



April 19th, 2018

Statement to the United Nations by Honor Keeler, Assistant Director, Utah Diné Bikéyah
Title: Looting & Grave-Robbing at Bears Ears National Monument- Ongoing Human Rights Violations
Agenda Item #4

Dear Madam Chair,

My name is Honor Keeler. I am a citizen of Cherokee Nation and the Assistant Director at Utah Diné Bikéyah, an American Indian non-profit organization with an all-Native American Board that seeks to protect the Bears Ears cultural landscape, the traditional knowledge of five Tribes, and implement a vision to support our future.

The Bears Ears National Monument was proposed by tribes and Indigenous Peoples of Utah in the United States, based upon traditional practices and cultural management in the old ways. This happened in response to violations of our human rights as indigenous people, such as was revealed in 2009, when 24 people were arrested in the largest archaeological raid in US history, confiscating 40,000 cultural objects from non-indigenous communities adjacent to Bears Ears National Monument. As a result of the 2015 request from Tribes, President Obama created the 1.9 M acre Bears Ears National Monument. However, the Trump administration issued a proclamation in December, illegally reducing the monument by 1.1 Million acres. During the public engagement process which considered reducing more than 20 national monuments, over 2.9 MILLION COMMENTS were received and over 98% condemned the Monument reductions. Yet, the subsequent elimination of 85% of Bears Ears National Monument still happened. This was done without the free, prior and informed consent of tribal nations and indigenous peoples, once again putting over 100,000 sacred and burial places at increased danger of destruction and desecration.

The Indigenous Peoples of the Four corners area in the United States have practiced their ceremonies and culturally managed this sacred landscape for thousands of years. It is a place known for healing by all tribes and its creation was a recognition of tribal sovereignty, Indigenous self-determination, and acknowledgement of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and Indigenous human rights. However, as surely as this was recognized, it was taken away by the Trump administration in Proclamation 9681.

We recommend to this body that the expedited monument management planning process, which is currently moving forward for the smaller area, be halted while the courts decide upon the legality of President Trump's proclamation. Otherwise, thousands of years of knowledge being offered by tribes will be left out, once again. This expedited management planning process cannot adequately address protecting the vast number of cultural, sacred, and environmental resources in these smaller units, nor across the broader Bears Ears region.

Most of the Bears Ears landscape reopened to mineral leasing in February, and the looting of Indigenous ancestral burial sites, as well as the desecration of active religious altars, petroglyphs and rock art, and other sacred places continues, and can never be restored. We are at critical juncture when the richness of our future, is intertwined with the wisdom of our past and our ability to convince political leaders that our voice matters.

We recommend the UN Special Rapporteur direct the United States to respond to these human rights violations, to formally adopt the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into law, and wait until this issue has worked through the courts before producing a hasty management plan. Most importantly, we recommend they honor tribes by basing the protection of indigenous sacred places on traditional cultural management practices, collaborative management, and free, prior and informed consent with indigenous people.