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Promoting Social Justice, Human Rights, and Peace

Drumbeat for Mother Earth

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VO (man): This is my home. This is our home with the Mother Earth. Everything around here has life. There's spirit. There's spirit to these trees, the ground, these plants -- even this air and the wind, the wind that blows.

VO (woman 1): And this respect for all life-forms, and all of the roles that each life-form has and the responsibilities that we have within that network of life is something important to us because we were given the directions, the instructions, to care for Mother Earth in a way that life would continue.

VO (woman 2): All of our ceremonies, all of our teachings come from things in Nature. They come from the growing cycle, and everything is tied to the Earth. And if those ties are broken, basically, then our way of life has changed and is destroyed.

VO (Spanish man)

Written text: There is a great saying from our ancestors in Guatemala that goes, "Everything you do to the Earth, you are doing to yourself."

Spanish spoken part: Hay un gran dicho de nuestros antepasados en Guatemala que dice que todo lo que le haces a la Tierra te lo haces a ti mismo.

VO (woman 3): When I was growing up I thought I was safe from the outside. My family, they raised me up on the land.

VO (woman 4): We lived with it all our lives and we're gonna die with it. We're not going to stop eating it. We know it's contaminated.

VO (woman 5): That this is something that is killing us and that it is, in fact, current genocide of our people.

Written text: Drumbeat for Mother Earth. How persistent organic pollutants threaten the natural environment and the future of Indigenous Peoples.

Written text: University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Harlan McKosato: This is the Monday, June 14th edition of Native America Calling. I'm Harlan McKosato [producer and host Native America Calling]. Today we're talking about POPs, persistent organic pollutants. We're going to take a look at how the pollutants affect our health and our culture.

First of all, POPs are highly toxic chemicals and compounds that make their way into the environment and more alarmingly, into our food chain - stuff like polychlorinated biphenyls or PCBs, DDT, dioxin, and furan, which are all highly toxic and carcinogenic.

Now what's happening, as these toxic compounds become water or airborne, they eventually end up in the food chain. Fish, for example, get POPs into their system and they build up in their fatty tissues. Then something comes along, maybe a bigger fish comes along and eats that fish, passing on those toxins. Eventually, they make their way up the food chain to us, you and I.

Written text: How are we exposed to POPs?

Written text: Oneida Nation, Wisconsin

Jennifer Hill-Kelley: (Oneida Nation-Wisconsin): The pulp and paper manufacturing area along the Fox River has contaminated not only the fish, but a lot of the wildlife.

Leah Ziese: (Oneida Nation-Wisconsin): I choose not to eat fish anymore because everything is so polluted. And I just, I don't want it in me. So I just, I choose to let the whole fish thing go.

Jennifer Hill-Kelley:: The sediments are polluted with PCBs as well as the fish tissue.

Leah Ziese: It's sad because they're not only hurting people, they're hurting animals, and we eat the animals; so they're still hurting us.

Jaycob Robertson (Anishinabeg Nation-Minnesota): And to pollute the fish and animals, which means that they would pollute us 'cause we eat the fish and animals. And some of my favorite foods come from animals and fish. It's really sad that I can't eat a lot of it 'cause there's too much stuff going on.

Jennifer Hill-Kelley:: What's unfortunate is that the generation following me doesn't even remember a time when that was occurring, when fishing was the way of life for the Oneida.

Harlan McKosato: Also joining us is**Pat Costner**:.

Pat Costner:: Most countries stopped making PCBs back in the 1970's. But because they're so persistent and because they are still in use, particularly in electrical equipment, they're still circulating in the environment.

Written text: Native American men are exposed to PCBs by eating fish from the Great Lakes.

Jennifer Hill-Kelley:: So the PCBs that are there have been there for probably 20 years or more. You know, they're there, we know they're there we need to clean them up, and you know, let's get to it.

Harlan McKosato: OK, let me give out our listener question right now, and ask our callers to go ahead and pick up the phone right now and give us a call. We're asking: has your community been affected by these persistent organic pollutants? I mean, have you had any warnings about eating the fish in your area?

Written text: Fish Consumption Advisory... Penobscot River.. due to PCBs.. and dioxin..

Rebecca Sockbeson: (Penobscot Nation-Maine, Indigenous Resistance Against Tribal Extinction): One year the advisory was only eat one fish a week. The next year the advisory was only eat one fish a month and mind you, my reserve is on an island, and this is a staple of our diet. The last two years, the EPA has told us, don't eat any fish and don't even swim in the river.

Written text: Penobscot Nation, Maine

Rebecca Sockbeson:: Fishing, and being on the river is a staple of who we are. When we canoed up river we always canoed by the mills. I always knew that there was something wrong because they were telling us that the water was nasty to swim in. Now that many in the community are clear that there's a dioxin discharge, people choose not to eat the fish. But that's a forced choice. That's very much different than making a choice.. an informed choice.. about what you're gonna go eat at the restaurant.

Jennifer Hill-Kelley:: What the loss of fish has meant to our community is that we've lost a significant nutritional part of our diet which has been replaced by something that's non-traditional and more often than not, you know, junk food, or staples from the commodity government surplus program which is high carbohydrates, high sugar, high fat type of things. And so, you know, that has lead to an increase of diabetes in our community and those kind of related illnesses.

Rebecca Sockbeson:: I just remember time periods where there were just elders just dying right and left from cancer. However, in order for the government to do

anything - this is yet another one of their excuses - is that we need to prove the link--what would seem to me to a very logical link, and rational link. We have to prove scientifically that link between the discharge of the paper mill and the health of the people on the island.

Dr. Peter Montague:, Director, Environmental Research Foundation: Native people are simply ignored. Their health is not considered, their lifestyle is not considered, their wellbeing is not considered. They are ciphers, they are zeros, they are out of the equation entirely.

Written text: Maya Cakchiquel Nation, Chimaltenango, Guatemala

Pat Costner:: Of the 12 POPs that have been identified in the global process at the moment, nine of them are pesticides. That means they're deliberately produced materials. It's not that difficult to order industry to stop making materials.

Francisco Cali:

Written text: My name is **Francisco Cali**. I am from the Maya Cakchiquel tribe in Guatemala. There are pesticides that were banned many years ago in Europe and the U.S. that are still being heavily used in our countries. One of the clearest examples of this is the famous pesticide, DDT. This is especially serious among the Indigenous populations. In addition, in Guatemala, you can actually smell the chemicals in areas using non-traditional agriculture.

Spanish spoken part: Soy **Francisco Cali**. Soy Maya Cakchiquel de Guatemala. Hay pesticidas que desde hace muchÃsimos aÃ±os atras se han prohibido en paÃses Europeos o aquÃ mismo en Estados Unidos que en nuestros paÃses en Ã©ste momento se estÃ¡n utilizando a diestra y siniestra...y uno de los ejemplos mÃ¡s claro de esto es el del famoso DDT. Esto es mucho mÃ¡s grave esencialmente en las poblaciones IndÃgenas.

Inclusive ustedes pueden ir a Guatemala...pueden ver...inclusive no ver sino que oler el ambiente en los lugares donde hay muchas plantaciones de productos no tradicionales, el olor a los quÃmicos en el ambiente pues.

Senator Patrick Leahy, D-Vermont: If we're aware of the problem now, then why are we treating the Third World like an open-air dumping ground and unfortunate citizens like human guinea pigs? We must also be concerned that when EPA takes action to protect American farmers and consumers by banning a pesticide that it has the effect of dumping the culprit on an unsuspecting Third World causing further injury there.

Francisco Cali::

Written text: The effect of pesticides on the workers should worry the authorities in Guatemala as well as the countries that export them. These exporting countries prohibit these pesticides, but only on products they are importing, not on products that we Guatemalans are consuming.

Spanish spoken part: El efecto hacia las mismas personas que trabajan en Ã©ste lugar es algo que debe de preocupar no sÃ³lo a las autoridades Guatemaltecas sino que tambiÃ©n a las autoridades de estos paÃses que son los que estÃ¡n exigiendo una medida de no uso de pesticidas en los cultivos pero sÃ³lo para los productos que ellos estÃ¡n importando no necesariamente hacia los productos que los mismos Guatemaltecos estamos consumiendo en nuestro paÃs.

Written text: What are POPs?

Harlan McKosato: Pat, maybe you can help us define exactly what POPs are, because you know part of how POPs, I guess, gets their name is because they are persistent in our environment, meaning that they resist any kind of a photolytic or any kind of other biological degradation. First of all, I guess, could you explain a little bit more about what these chemicals are, and also what makes them so resistant?

Pat Costner:: Let me say first that ordinarily we think of organic in everyday life as something that's good, as in organic farming. For POPs the "organic" is a chemical term. And in chemistry it just means something; a compound that's carbon based. Now a chemical is a POP, a persistent organic pollutant, if it's toxic, and as you pointed out, if it's very stable; meaning if you release it into the air or into the water, the normal processes don't break it down.

Written text:
Persistent breaks down very slowly
Organic contains carbon
Pollutant toxic

Pat Costner:: POPS are by definition, bioaccumulative. That means most of them are fat-loving. So once you release some of these compounds, as they move through the environment they are preferentially accumulated in living creatures.

Robert Shimek:, Anishinabeg Nation-Minnesota, Indigenous Environmental Network: You can't see it. You can't feel it. You can't smell it. You can't - your senses don't register that these things, this dioxin, you know it's on this grass right here in front of us. You know it's in the foliage on these trees. It's in the water, you know, it's ubiquitous, its all through our environment.

Jack Weinberg:, Senior Campaigner, Greenpeace: When people think of toxic pollution, they think of grease on the top, they think of algae blooms, they think of

all kinds of conventional pollutions that are visible; they smell, fish are dying off, it's a very nasty thing. They think of black smoke coming out of chimneys.

Persistent pollutants are a different kind. They're invisible. They don't taste. They don't smell. They have their effect in very small quantities, so small they're not visible. But they build up through the food chain and in very minute quantities in living things they disrupt the biological system. So this is a kind of pollution that we don't see, we don't smell, we don't taste, it seems mysterious, things often look very clean. But what it does is, it destroys life, it destroys the ability of life to reproduce, and it disrupts the potential of future generations.

Rebecca Sockbeson:: It's where we're from, that's where our ancestors have always been. And that's a beauty that is inarticulate. When you lift that layer, as with the river and the pollutants in the river, when you lift that layer of beauty, what you're seeing is cancer, no-gut-syndrome, the inability to practice that which your ancestors have always practiced.

Jackie Warledo, Seminole Nation-Oklahoma, Greenpeace and Indigenous Environmental Network: The right to practice our religion, the right to bear healthy children, the right to live in a world that is free from contamination - I think those are basic human rights that are being violated.

Written text: Social Dance at the 10th Annual Indigenous Environmental Network Conference, New Mexico.

Written text: Rex Tilousi, Chairman, Havasupai Nation, Arizona

Written text: How do POPs affect our lands and our families?

Angel Valencia:, Yaqui Nation-Sonora, Mexico:

Written text: My village used to be green and full of life like this place. Little by little, our Yaqui people have become poorer due to the constant application of pesicides through policies of the Rural Bank.

Spanish spoken part: Antes era verde asÃ, como vemos Ã©ste lugar....lleno de vida. Hoy nuestros pueblos Yaquis han ido empobreciendo poco a poco por los constantes pesticidas que se aplicaron por medio de Banco Rural.

Written text: Yaqui Nation, Sonora, Mexico

Angel Valencia:, Yaqui Nation-Sonora, Mexico:

Written text: I had a dear friend - may he rest in peace... He used to carry a pesticide tank on his back. Over time, some of the chemicals spilled onto his back. Gradually, his skin was burned, his blood poisoned, and he died.

Spanish spoken part: Inclusive yo tuve, yo tenÃa un camarada, un amigo, en paz descanse. El tambiÃ©n andaba con un tanquicito echando tambiÃ©n, insecticidas. Se le cayÃ³, se le tirÃ³ el broque poco a poco en la espalda y con el tiempo se quemÃ³ la piel, se envenenÃ³ la sangre, y perdiÃ³ la vida.

Dr. Elizabeth Guillette:, University of Arizona: This was the area of the Green Revolution in Mexico, where it started. So pesticides have been in use since the late 1940's, starting with DDT. The children living in the valley, which is the pesticide area, had deficits in every single thing that I tested, both as 4 and 5 year olds, and as 6 and 7 year olds.

Written text: The children were from the Yaqui Nation in Sonora, Mexico.

Dr. Elizabeth Guillette:: OK one of the things I did was have them draw a picture of a person. The 4-year-olds in the foothills area drew fairly complete people.

Written text: Drawing by children from an area that has not used pesticides.

Dr. Elizabeth Guillette:: In contrast, the 4-year-olds in the agricultural area did mostly scribbles that were totally unidentifiable.

Written text: Drawing by children from an area that has used pesticides for decades.

Harlan McKosato: Kids, children are more adversely affected, I guess, than humans. I mean, exactly what you're saying. But could you explain a little bit about why kids are more susceptible?

Jackie Warledo: Well a lot of that is because impacts are transferred from the parent.

Dr. Elizabeth Guillette:: They've shown that they can be transferred three generations. Because the mother releases these compounds in her blood during pregnancy. They pass through the placenta, and affect the developing fetus.

Jackie Warledo: The quality of life for our future generations is diminishing generation by generation and that's such an injustice.

Dr. Elizabeth Guillette:: The general feeling is - continue breastfeeding. Don't stop breastfeeding because the time the child is affected is probably in utero.

Children just by being a child have a much higher intake of contamination than the adult. These contaminants travel in the air. Children breathe well over twice as much air as an adult. These contaminants can also be absorbed through the skin. And where do children play? On the dirt. On our rugs. They play on the ground where pesticides and dioxins will settle down.

Written text: Anishinabeg Nation, Minnesota.

Robert Shimek:: One of the things our elders have always talked about, an essential part of our culture, has always been fire. And we're taught how to use fire in a way that can be useful to our Indian people. All the way from the provision of warmth and food preparation to healing, and purifying and doctoring and trying to understand-trying to seek higher understandings.

Fire in many aspects has been like a life-giving force in the Native culture and when used and respected in that manner, you know, many things have been made possible for us that, you know, without them things could have been very much different throughout the history of our people here on this continent. So when we light that fire in a ceremonial manner, you know it's out of respect, you know and it's about a spirit of good intentions, good things.

There's another type of fire that's burning, and it's a fire, it's a people that have taken the fire and are abusing it and disrespecting it. And incineration of medical waste, as well as other types of waste, you know is one of the key factors in terms of that relationship between, you know, the dioxin in our environment and dioxin in the human, human foodchain.

Harlan McKosato: Pat, I guess one of the questions is what can, what can consumers do?

Pat Costner:: Well, at home, one of the most important things you can do is to watch what you buy.

Jackie Warledo: Examples I want to give you of just where you find it in your daily life are products. So stay away from PVC. Don't use it.

Pat Costner:: PVC is a particular problem. Polyvinyl chloride plastic is a chlorinated material. When you burn it, either in your backyard, or in a landfill fire, or even in a dedicated incinerator, when you burn PVC, you make dioxins.

Harlan McKosato: We've got our phone callers lighting up our phone lines here, let's go to Carol in Penasco, NM. You're on the air.

Carol: I've studied occupational health and the cancers and the problems start right in the manufacturer. People who make vinyl chloride plastics die of liver cancer at very high rates, make these, let these materials be used for are intravenous drug fluid bags, for dialysis tubes... There's an organization I'm working with called Healthcare Without Harm.

Written text: Vinyl manufacturing facility.

Written text: Health Care Without Harm Press Release: ...PVC IV products leach toxic chemicals.. Coalition launches effort to move hospitals away from PVC plastic.

Robert Shimek:: It's just a matter of time where, you know, hospital administrators will have the choice to, you know, be totally PVC-free.

Pat Costner:: So one of the more important things you can do is to avoid PVC products. And by all means do not burn PVC.

Written text: How do POPs move?

Harlan McKosato: These pollutants are now very prevalent in the food chain. And, you might ask, how in the world did they get there? Well, they're released through waste incineration where these compounds become airborne and these compounds do not degrade very easily. They're essentially thrown to the wind and they land, like you said, just about everywhere.

Pat Costner:: The reason that POPs have become a global issue, is because they have a unique way of travel. Again they don't degrade rapidly, they travel long distances.

Jackie Warledo: How they travel I think is important for people to understand why you have to be concerned even if you don't live near what's clearly an industrial site.

Pat Costner:: And they tend to accumulate, preferentially, in the colder regions of the planet.

Jackie Warledo: People can be contaminated far from the source.

Pat Costner:: For example, DDT that it is used in India, or in Mexico, may have a grasshopper effect. It may volatilize, move into the air, re-condense at a cooler place and repeat that process until the highest levels will appear in the Arctic, in the colder regions.

Jackie Warledo: They're going to travel through the soil, through the air, through the water, with the elements that are part of the Earth. The elements that have always been a part of the Earth - that have always moved the air and what was in the air. So if we put poison in the air, the elements are going to help move to that as well.

Written text: Gwich'in Nation, Arctic Village, Alaska

Faith and Camille Gemmill:, Gwich'in Nations, Alaska, Gwich'in Steering Committee: My name is **Faith Gemmill**:. I'm Gwich'in from Arctic Village, Alaska. It's cold where I live. It gets like 70 below for one week in the winter and 40 below is average and 20 below is warm. In the summer time you have the midnight sun, it

doesn't set and it's warm. That's the time when we gather and prepare for winter because it's so cold.

Our villages are so isolated too that we can't really rely on store-bought foods. And like when the people get sick they know which part of the caribou to cook, and how to eat it, and it'll help them heal. So it's everything to us....and we use every part of it again. The skins are laid out to dry to be tanned later. When we're hunting, that's a time when our people are one with the land again and everything around us. We're back, we're together as one. We have one heart, one mind, one spirit. And that's a time when the grandmothers and the mothers teach their daughters how to tan the skin, how to take care of the meat, the family lineage, the family ties to the land, history of our people. And the men teach the young boys how to hunt, how to give proper thanks, how to share the meat, what parts to give to the elders. And that's how we live, every fall it's the same cycle.

Camille Gemmill:: Wah!

Faith Gemmill:: That's right baby.... Look! Look! We know there's toxics on the land, like a sponge it soaks it up and it goes right into the lichen. Caribou eats lichen. When caribou eats lichen it goes straight to the bone marrow and that's what we eat - that's a delicacy for us. We've lived with it all our lives and we're going to die with it. We're not going to stop eating it. We know it's contaminated.

We never used to have lots of cancer. We have high rates of cancer and young people, my age and older are getting it. That was something unheard of. A lot of our elders, they'd die, like, 100, 110, 90, 90 on, that's their average death. Nowadays, it's 40 years old sometimes because of cancer.

Our diet is part of us, it's our life, and it's part of our culture, it's who we are. So no, we could never change anything. They should change. Why should we have to change for what they're doing?

Written text: What are industry and government doing about POPs?

Harlan McKosato: What has been the response - Pat or Tom-- Of the people who are actually producing POPs?

Michael P. Walls:, Senior Attorney, Chemical Manufacturer's Association: Well, our policy at the Chemical Manufacturer's Association has been for persistent toxic and bioaccumulative substances that those are substances of concern. They merit prompt attention.

Tom Goldtooth: How do we get the industries are to be accountable to the people? You know we have a structure where corporations and the laws that allow corporations to operate are not accountable to the people. They have more rights, in fact, then we do, as all humans.

The whole policy around EPA developing environmental laws and policies is based upon risk assessment. I don't know how many of our tribal people know that. It's based upon, you know, one out of ten, out of a hundred thousand, are allowed to die ratios.

Dr. Peter Montague:: The first thing you do with a risk-assessment is you decide how many people it's OK to kill. That's the first thing you do. You set your "bag-limit" on citizens.

Michael P. Walls: Well, I think our record as the industry has been that you can manage risks appropriately, that you can manage chemicals.

Dr. Peter Montague:: These are real living people that are going to be killed by the process that you are putting in place and it's hard to put a good face on that.

Michael P. Walls: That's one of the tools. You use exposure assessments, hazard assessments, risk assessments.

Dr. Peter Montague:: This is intentional killing of large numbers of people.

Jennifer Hill-Kelley:: It is a large manufacturing area that we're adjacent to, and there are a lot of concerns about, you know, what are we breathing? How are these things affecting us?

Dr. Peter Montague:: A group of largely white males, tend to cluster in a room and make a deal to start up a new paper mill, a new incinerator, a new metal smelter, some machine that's going to put out large quantities of toxic material which will filter into a community. And they need cover that, that says this will be safe. They know it's not safe. On the face of it it's not safe to put toxic materials into a human community but a risk-assessment puts a lot of mathematical mumbo jumbo onto that political decision and makes it appear to be safe.

Michael P. Walls: Our goal as the industry is to promote the type of assessments and characterizations of risk of our substances both in the community, in the communities in which our facilities are, and more broadly. So that these risks can be addressed and the appropriate risk-management actions taken to minimize those risks.

Rebecca Sockbeson:: Who he is, and his identity is not necessarily grounded in fishing, and fiddle-heading and canoeing. That his, you know, historical identity has been based in privilege -- in white, male, heterosexual, corporate privilege.

Tom Goldtooth, Dine Nation-Minnesota, National Director, Indigenous Environmental Network: (pointing at Chemical Manufacturer's Association sign) These are the number-one gangsters that are killing our people. These are the ones

who are initiating very strategic "drive-bys" in Congress, that are still allowing toxic pollution into our communities.

Written text: How do POPs affect our relationship to Nature?

Tom Goldtooth: So, one thing that we have as Native Peoples is we have a relationship to Nature. And this comes through our clans, and our clan relations. Numerous studies have found that a lot of our Animal Nation, and Bird Nation have been negatively affected by these persistent bioaccumulative toxics.

A lot of our people that still live off the land and with the land, they see these things happening. They see the living evidence and proof that something is not right...something is out of balance.

We have some people, some tribes, that are wind clans. They're connected to the wind.

Written text: Jackie Warledo, Member of the Wind Clan

Jackie Warledo: Well, of course the wind is a very special element to me. The wind is such a strong element. It can be soft, gentle....It can be very strong and powerful and the wind is what helps to, you know, pollinate - wind helps to carry life.

Tom Goldtooth: We have some clans that are connected to the Eagle Nation, Fish Nation-- we have many clans out there. We have some people that are connected to the Bear Clan. My relatives, and our way is the bear. I work with the bear. So it affects me when the polar bears' contaminated. And I know in my mind, and my heart, that the grizzly bears and the black bears are also being contaminated from these same toxic chemicals that we're talking about.

Jennifer Hill-Kelley:: I'm a member of the turtle clan and although you know, there aren't a lot of studies--we don't have a lot of information on turtles as we do on fish, certainly we know that the turtles live in aquatic environments and we've seen the decrease of turtles in our waterways.

Tom Goldtooth: We also have relationship to the Plant Nation. The Plant Nation also sustains us, like this plant here in front of me.

Angel Valencia::

Written text: We have a great tradition involving medicinal and edible plants. Our tradition is that when we cut or harvest a plant, we have to talk to that plant and ask its permission so that it will not be destroyed. As a cultured person, I have to do this. If a friend wants to harvest a plant, he has to do the same thing, I want to protect the plants, my people, and work the land to obtain daily substance.

Spanish spoken part: Nostros tenemos una tradiciÃ³n muy grande en nuestras plantas medicinales y tambiÃ©n en nuestras plantas de consumo. Â¿No? Nosotros tenemos esta tradiciÃ³n que podemos...que cuando vamos a cortar una plantita, tenemos que platicar con esa plantita. Tenemos que pedirle permiso a esa planta para que no se destruya. Yo, cÃ³mo persona de cultura, yo tengo que hacerlo y si va otro compaÃ±ero tiene que hacerlo tambiÃ©n lo mismo y por eso yo busco la protecciÃ³n...yo quisiera un apoyo...algo..pues que se puede hacer...para proteger a esas plantas, y proteger a mi gente, y tambiÃ©n...pues, para trabajar nuestra tierra para que consigan el susento de cada dÃa.Â¿No?

Written text: How do POPs affect treaty rights?

Harlan McKosato: Let me ask you this as we look toward tomorrow's program, at treaty rights, what good are fish and hunting rights if the fish and game are contaminated?

Rebecca Sockbeson:: My ancestors signed a treaty in 1820 and that was ratified, which was essentially confirmed in 1980 in our land claim settlement that we would have a right to fish in our river. And for the past ten years that those fish, that that river has been, to our awareness level, completely polluted, we have not exercised our treaty right.

Written text: According to the U.S. government advisories, no fish should be eaten from this river.

Jennifer Hill-Kelley:: Sovereignty can't be taken away, it's given up by tribes - either through treaties in exchange for reserved rights, or through agreements. And you know, of all the treaties that were made with the Indigenous Nations of the U.S., I'm sure all of them have been broken. But the current, today, type of sovereignty that the tribes can exercise is guaranteed to them through federal law. It's not our law, its federal law established through the U.S. Constitution, and through the Supreme Court case law and through executive orders. So the federal government because of treaties and agreements with tribes have the trust responsibility to ensure that the tribes' rights and uses are protected.

Written text: Executive Order #12898 "...enforcement of all health and environmental statutes in areas with minority populations..."

Faith Gemmill:: I don't think the U.S, government has taken responsibility for the contamination in the Arctic. We're the sinkhole. The North, and the Southern poles are the sinkhole of all the contaminants from the U.S. Everywhere we go - I've been to Congress, I've talked to Congressional members, I've told them what I'm telling you, how it's affecting us, what we see on the land. And they don't listen. And it's just like talking to a wall. It doesn't affect them. They don't see it everyday. They don't live where we live, they don't live how we live and they don't understand what it means to us. So, no, they'll never hear us. Until it's too late maybe.

Tom Goldtooth: You know this government never really wanted us around. This government has a whole history of genocide. Policies that are written in historical documents: from the introduction of smallpox-infected blankets that were issued by the government agency. Policies of totally devastating our tribal villages, removals of whole populations. A lot of our elders, they still tell me that this is occupied land. In many ways it's no different that the guns and rifles of the cavalry that had a campaign to wipe out our Native people. There's a lot of similarity with the actions of the cavalry, and the actions of current policy that are failing to protect the health and the future of our Native people.

Rebecca Sockbeson:: We're being killed literally, literally killed. So when I talk about genocide in a historical context I don't mean to do that, it's really currently going on.

Written text: 25th Annual Meeting, International Indian Treaty Council, Bear Butte, South Dakota, 1999.

Harlan McKosato: How do we deal with this? Do we just simply reduce the amount of these POPs being released into our environment or should there be a worldwide ban on these chemicals?

Pat Costner:: Several years ago the United Nations Environment Program launched a process so that we will end up, we believe within the next couple of years, with a global legally-binding agreement to reduce or eliminate at least a beginning list of 12 of the POPs.

Jackie Warledo: I think a lot of our Native people are familiar with treaties and the treaty-making processes of the past. This is a treaty making of present.

Written text: First United Nations treaty negotiation on POPs, Montreal, Canada, June 28, 1998

Jackie Warledo: It was very strong. Because it showed the delegates as they went in to talk about the issues of persistent organic pollutants what the purpose, one of the main purposes of the international globally-binding treaty is supposed to have which is the protection of the future generations.

Jack Weinberg:: It was almost like a religious experience. Many people expressed that afterwards. They were saying something that was very strong.

Jackie Warledo: Well it's important that the language in the treaty be as strong as possible.

Michael P. Walls: We've been an active participant on the international debates on persistent organic pollutants.

Tom Goldtooth: They've been very active, they've been sending a lot of their technical staff.

Michael P. Walls: We've been actively working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on its own strategy involving persistent bioaccumulative and toxic substances.

Tom Goldtooth: Sending their attorneys, their policy makers.

Michael P. Walls: And, as in the past, we will work for reasonable public policy.

Tom Goldtooth: It's kind of a form of economic blackmail.

Jack Weinberg:: The chemical industry is in a funny position. At an individual level, if an individual chemical company has a problem because there's dioxin or PCBs that it's responsible for, it will deny that there's any problem at all, that there's any proof, that there's any health problem associated with these pollutants. They'll just stone wall. But at the global scale, the trade associations, the chemical industries understand they can't just deny.

Michael P. Walls: We believe that there are obviously deposition of some substances in remote regions is an issue of serious concern.

Jack Weinberg:: The nature of POPs makes them inherently unmanageable. There is no effective way. Every effort to better manage and better control POPs will ultimately fail. If they're used, if they're produced, they enter the environment, they build up in the foodchain, they don't disperse. They become more dilute. They become concentrated in the foodchain, they travel long distances. These are not substances that humankind is capable of properly managing and properly controlling. And therefore, elimination means a systematic policy to end their production, to end their use, to end the activities that generate them.

Jackie Warledo: We have to step up to the plate. We have to go in and be present. We have to have our voices heard. We have to do this on our own. The State Department nor the UN process....neither are going to come and ask us what we think. But they will hear us when we speak. But we have to go before them and speak clearly, speak loudly, and be very present and have our say in why this is important to us and why, why we want the governments of the world to take responsibility for their contaminants and their impact on our lives.

Francisco Cali::

Written text: It is necessary to begin this process now. Tomorrow will be too late. All I could tell them is that they should eliminate and prohibit these chemicals, not regulate them. Not just for our sake, but for future generations. They have damaged us a lot more than they have helped us.

Spanish spoken part: Es necesario empezar ese proceso. Porque si no lo hacemos hoy, cuando lo querramos a hacer maÃ±ana va a ser muy tarde...lo Ãºnico que yo podrÃa decirles es de que no por nostros sino por la futuras generaciones hay que empezar a no regularizar sino empezar a prohibir y eliminar el uso de todos los pesticidas que nos han hecho mucho mÃ¡s daÃ±o que el beneficio que nos han traÃdo.

Faith Gemmill:: We don't know how long it's going to be there and we don't know how-we don't even know all the effects yet, and we haven't even seen all of the effects yet. I'd say that everybody's lives depend on it, not just us in the North, but everybody.

Rebecca Sockbeson:: They have a choice, essentially. They have a choice to get the courage to make these changes. Their other choice is to essentially be compliant and be a party to genocidal practices. So, to me it's not even a choice.

Written text: What is our responsibility?

Tom Goldtooth: This is my number one Mother, this Earth. My mother that brought me into this world is the true reflection of this number one Mother. So we have to respect these things - our Father Sky, the Creation, the creative principles. And there's a balance there. There is a natural law that takes place - a natural law. A lot of our teachings talks about these things; how we have responsibility as Native peoples, as Indigenous Peoples throughout the world. And I've talked to a lot of the Indigenous Peoples about these things. And they all have something that's very consistent is that they understand our relationship to our Mother the Earth and they understand that we have a responsibility to take care of this Earth. And those teachings have been integrated into our tradition, into our values, to who we are, our face, who we are.

Jackie Warledo: So, to change your lifestyle isn't the answer. To change your lifestyle would mean to walk away from your culture; to walk away from the things that you've known, the things that help give you your identity, your inner strength. And these are very important. I mean, this is---every group of people have a right to believe, they have a right to practice their religion in the ways that they choose to. Particularly the ways that have been passed on to you from the people before you.

Faith Gemmill:: So we had the first Gwich'in gathering in over 100 years in Arctic Village, my hometown and it was a traditional meeting. There was no agenda. Everyone that got up to speak, the only requirements there was, was that they talked our language, they held the talking stick and they spoke from the heart. And everybody got up and spoke. People that are shy even got up and spoke, that's how much it meant to us. And they talked about how important the land is, how important the caribou is, how important the calving grounds are. And a birthplace to us is sacred because it's a place that brings forth life. And the elders said no birthplace should ever be disturbed. So everybody discussed how they felt, and then

we reached agreement by consensus. All 15 Gwich'in villages from Canada and Alaska would fight to protect the birthplace of the caribou with one voice.

Tom Goldtooth: We need to work together, bringing in our tribal leaders, in a united front to protect our people, our tribal citizens, our grass roots, to protect our traditional practioners, our women and our children and our future generations.

Faith Gemmill:: I want my baby to be able to canoe up river and not have to smell the mills, nor have to paddle through foam.

Tom Goldtooth: As we do this work, addressing these issues, a day doesn't go by when I don't think about the impact to my children.

Jackie Warledo: To know their culture, to know their language, to know their family, to be free of the worry of whether the food they eat is poisoning them, to bear children of their own that are strong and healthy, mentally, physically and spiritually, to have strong minds, strong spirits and strong health. I think that those are the same hopes and dreams that most people have for their future. And those are the dreams that I have. And I will do what I can as I think any mother would, any grandmother would to do my best to see that they have that chance.

MUSIC SEGMENT

Tom Goldtooth: We must not forget our traditional teachings. We must always remember that sacred fire - that's our foundation that gives us direction, support, and strength.

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