

## **CSJ Position Statement on the Rights of Indigenous Persons Worldwide**

### **CSJ Position**

Counselors for Social Justice supports the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as passed by the UN on September 13, 2007 (UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples, 2007). Counselors for Social Justice recognizes that Indigenous People's Rights are Human Rights. Article 7 of the UDHR states "... are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law."

### **Rationale**

Counselors committed to social justice recognize the profession's responsibility to advocate for human rights and are resolved to work to promote those rights. CSJ, on behalf of its members, join the ACA in endorsing the UN General Assembly's Declaration on Rights of Indigenous People. This position is consistent with CSJ's values and goals and is in keeping with the American Counseling Association's (ACA, 2001) endorsement of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

There is a history of denying rights to Indigenous Peoples in the United States and around the globe despite the substantial body of empirical knowledge that exists describing the negative effects of the denial of human rights on human development, mental health wellness, families and children. Upholding the Human Rights of Indigenous persons around the globe to "protect their lands and resources, and to maintain their unique cultures and traditions" and, supporting the UN Declaration is consistent with the mission of CSJ.

### **Relevance to Counseling**

Political stressors, social stressors, and environmental stressors have all been linked to physical and psychological well-being (Moore, 2003; Miller, 2007; Coyhis & White 2006). The influence of disadvantaged status of indigenous peoples on mental health and well being can be seen worldwide. Indigenous people's stories, the primary agent of instruction in oral societies, have been deeply eroded and/or erased in a very damaging way by those who grabbed power and self-determination away from the indigenous populations of the US. As a result young Native Americans struggle with identity issues along with all the other problems that accompany a disadvantaged status. Native American youth struggle with their identity because they do not know their stories (Horn, 2003; Moore, 2003). This loss contributes to issues of alcohol and drug abuse. Coyhis and White (2006) write of the ongoing erosion of indigenous stories by the perpetuation of myths such as the one that speaks of native people as being born with a hypersensitivity to alcohol and predisposition to violence. While Native American populations have an inordinately heavy burden of discrimination to deal with and could benefit from socially just mental health services, culturally appropriate services are very often unavailable. Upholding the human rights of these people is a first step to changing this situation.

Mental health and well-being is influenced by the extent to which communities and populations are denied rights. Counselors, as professionals committed to the health and

well-being of clients, must consider the environmental and contextual influences on mental health (Lee, 2007; Toporek, Gerstein, Fouad, Roysircar, & Israel, 2006).

### **Recommended Actions**

CSJ is resolved to promote and support indigenous peoples' rights through individual, community, and societal/organizational advocacy.

1. Counselors can promote and support indigenous peoples' rights on an individual level by ensuring their own cultural competence with regard to indigenous people. Counselors need to understand the historical context as well as contemporary and ongoing issues faced by indigenous people, including the effects of generational trauma and current policies on health and well-being. Towards this end, CSJ should establish a taskforce to work with the AMCD-NAIC to develop and promote this type of study by counselors. In addition, this taskforce can collaborate with ACES to facilitate culturally inclusive training around these issues in counselor education programs.
2. Counselors can foster empowerment of individual clients by connecting them with relevant advocacy groups.
3. School counselors can play an important role in reducing marginalizing experiences in children of indigenous groups by educating school administrators, teachers and children about these cultures and can serve to promote dignity and self-esteem by modeling appreciation and prizing for all cultures.
4. Community mental health counselors can work to reduce marginalizing and denigrating experiences by educating the community about the uniqueness of nearby indigenous cultures and encouraging the community to embrace all of its citizens. In addition, counselors can advocate for culturally specific services and agencies in their community.
5. CSJ should work with the AMCD Native American Interest Council (NAIC) and other such groups to put together guidance on ways counselors can do this.
6. CSJ should work with the AMCD-NAIC and other relevant groups to develop a list of advocacy and other resources for use by counselors for this purpose.
7. CSJ should initiate a joint taskforce with the AMCD –NAIC to develop and publish a list of specific recommendations for counselors and organizations that want to support indigenous people's rights.
8. CSJ should join with AMCD-NAIC and ASCA to facilitate training for counselors in these areas, and encourage them to have tribal people come speak to their classrooms when and where it is appropriate.
9. Within schools and colleges, counselors can work toward ensuring that mascots and symbols used in athletics and other organizations do not include references to indigenous people. CSJ can support and promote the work of Students and Teachers Against Racism (STAR) and other indigenous support groups across the country that have been working this issue for many years and have been providing materials to teachers that educate students about the indigenous people of the United States. CSJ should make this support and the available material known to ACA, AMCD, ACES and other professional Counseling and psychological associations.

10. CSJ should work to influence the United States and all other governmental systems to embrace the UN declaration and ensure that all its citizens are afforded the protection called for in it.

*Approved by the CSJ Board on 6/08.*