



Indian Reservation in New York. It seeks to help the most impoverished and underrepresented communities around the world by educating donors on the complex problems faced by indigenous peoples and the unique set of issues that accompanies indigenous-focused philanthropy. Initiatives that appear straightforward can often mask historical and social tensions that underscore many indigenous issues and can actually disrupt communities rather than help them. In addition, donors who work with indigenous communities and organizations face challenges as a result of language and cultural differences and geographic isolation.

To accomplish its goals, IFIP coordinates a variety of informational sessions at major donor conferences, organizes annual and international conferences like the one in New York, distributes a biannual newsletter to the philanthropic community, and maintains an informational website. And to encourage donors, it presents the annual IFIP award to the funder who makes the most outstanding contribution to indigenous support each year. This year, the award went to the Christensen Fund, which gives grants to maintain cultural and biological diversity in the world.

Earlier this year, IFIP partnered with the Levi Strauss Foundation to host its sixth annual conference, this time in San Francisco. "I'm thrilled that IFIP's conferences can bring indigenous issues to the forefront of the philanthropic community," said Evelyn Arce-White, executive director for IFIP. "This time we brought together more than 170 donors, indigenous leaders, and nongovernmental organizations from all over the world to discuss critical issues like global warming, land rights, social-change philanthropy, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples."

One notable session was the panel discussion on

global warming in the Arctic and its effects on indigenous peoples. Sarah James, a board member of the Gwich'in Steering Committee, testified first-hand to the impact of extreme climate change on the traditional lifeways of Arctic communities, noting that about 75 percent of her people's diet is still wild meat, berries, and roots, and that their activities are primarily hunting, fishing, and gathering. "In Alaska," she said, "there are 200 villages, and in each of the villages their major concern is respect for their traditional subsistence way of living. There are about 500,000 indigenous people from approximately 30 different tribes within the Arctic region for whom climate change is very real. In my life I've seen extreme changes."

James told her audience about heat waves in the Arctic, rain in the middle of winter, the absence of bees to pollinate plants, the appearance of southern animals, melting permafrost, and a shifting tree line. Her observations read like a ground report on what "unsustainable economy" looks like to peoples who live on the land. Instead of offering detailed technical recommendations, James offered a solution so simple, so often-quoted, and yet so important and so difficult to achieve that it may be the supreme challenge for the philanthropic community in coming generations: "We've got to have a spiritual connection to the Earth, to respect the Earth."

Brendan White (Mohawk) is the president of the Mohawk Communications Group and a freelance writer based in Akwesasne, New York. IFIP's next event will be a regional conference on Mexico and Central America, to be held in Querétaro, Mexico, in January 2008. To learn more about the conference or about IFIP, visit www.internationalfund.org. ■

Yusuf Ole Patenya, a Maasai leader from the Shompole community in Kenya, and Beto Borges of Forest Trends review their PowerPoint presentation at the IFIP conference in San Francisco.

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