



INDIAN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

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## **Minnesota Indian Affairs Council Seeks Immediate Action from University of Minnesota to Address Exploitation of American Indian Nations and People**

SAINT PAUL, MINN. – The Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC) is calling on the University of Minnesota to take swift and immediate actions to address institutional racism and improve the school’s relationship with Minnesota’s 11 federally recognized tribal nations. These actions include acknowledging past injustices and exploitation of Native American people and lands and taking steps to remedy them.

A key focal point was the University’s failure to fully comply with a 30 year old federal law requiring it to return the stolen Native American human remains to the tribal communities the deceased people came from, along with funerary object buried with these people for use and display at the University’s museum. MIAC passed resolutions demanding University action on this and other issues MIAC says need to be resolved as a part of building a long-term relationship based on trust and mutual respect.

“We are living in a moment in time when institutions and organizations everywhere are re-examining their practices and past deeds through a lens of racial awakening to understand how they may have contributed to institutional racism and oppression of people based on race,” said Robert Larsen, MIAC Board Chair and President of Lower Sioux Indian Community. “On behalf of Minnesota’s tribal nations, MIAC decided it is time for the University of Minnesota to own up to its own policies and actions rooted in institutional racism and call for immediate action to correct its past actions.

MIAC passed the following resolutions that highlight the University of Minnesota’s practices of institutional racism against Minnesota’s tribal nations and provide a path for remedy by the university:

### **Resolution 06262020-02: Repatriation of American Indian human remains and funerary objects**

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) is a federal law passed in 1990 requiring all federally funded institutions to repatriate and return any American Indian human remains and funerary objects in its custody. Despite NAGPRA having the force of law for 30 years, the University of Minnesota has failed to fully comply with returning human remains and continues to treat stolen sacred objects as University property for use and display at the University of Minnesota’s Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum.

“The University of Minnesota gives lip service to valuing racial justice and equality, yet for 30 years it has refused to obey the law requiring them to return the human remains and sacred objects of our

deceased relatives which they acquired from grave robbers and profiteers,” said Chairman Larsen, “MIAC demands that the University of Minnesota take immediate steps to end the inhumane practice of displaying these items, repatriate our deceased American Indian relatives to their home reservations and return all funerary objects to the Native Nations from which they came.”

**Resolution 06262020-03: Fulfilling the university’s obligations to Minnesota’s 11 tribal governments**

MIAC commended the University’s recent outreach toward tribes under the new leadership of President Gabel, but cautioned that before new relationships can be forged, past injustices must be acknowledged.

“For a new partnership to grow, we need regular consultation at the highest level of the University, just as we do with the state and federal government,” said Chairman Larsen, “We need to see a commitment to addressing racist policies of the past and righting the wrongs.”

A few injustices MIAC recited in the resolution include:

- Through the Medical School, conducting research for the U.S. Army in the 1950’s involving experimentation on Red Lake children without parental knowledge, causing the children to get nephritis
- Financially profiting from theft of tribal lands and resources in the past and today
- Attempted to replicate the DNA of Manoomin without involvement of tribal governments, which in its natural state is sacred to Anishinaabe people;
- Provided inadequate academic, financial and student support services to successfully recruit, admit, retain and graduate American Indian students;
- Inadequate recruitment, hiring and retention of Native American faculty
- Disrespected the sovereignty and self-governance of American Indian tribal governments through failure to consult with tribes about actions impacting tribes.

**Key Facts about the University of Minnesota’s history pertaining to Minnesota’s tribal nations:**

- The University of Minnesota is a land grant University pursuant to the Morrill Act of 1862 which allowed tribal lands in Minnesota to be wrongfully taken to build the University of Minnesota and other Universities (see “Land Grab Universities,” Lee and Ahtone, High Country News, March 30, 2020;
- In other words, the University of Minnesota owes its very existence to the taking of 94,439 acres of land from Minnesota’s 11 tribal governments. The University benefitted from the sale and lease of these tribal lands, which became part of the Permanent University Fund, worth more than \$543 million in 2016.
- The University still lays claim today to tribal lands within the Fond du Lac Reservation which were wrongfully taken from the Band.
- Like the United States and the State of Minnesota, the University of Minnesota owes special obligations and has responsibilities to the American Indian tribes of Minnesota which have for the most part gone unfulfilled, unrecognized, or ignored and policy-making at its campuses has continued to reflect paternalistic processes steeped in institutional racism
- While current University leadership has demonstrated a desire to build positive relationships with the American Indian tribal governments of Minnesota, there exists a long history at the

University of Minnesota of past leadership resisting calls to dismantle racist policies that still persist to this day.

MIAC mailed copies of the resolutions, as well as additional supporting information, to the office of University of Minnesota President Joan Gabel, as well as to the Board of Regents. The content sent to the University can be found here:

- <https://mn.gov/indianaffairs/miacresolutions.html> (link to all MIAC resolutions)
- <https://archive.scienceforthepeople.org/vol-6/v6n5/first-our-land-now-our-health/>
- <https://www.hcn.org/issues/52.4/indigenous-affairs-education-land-grab-universities>

MIAC said that while the recent political activism following the tragic murder of George Floyd is not the reason for bringing these resolutions forward, it has shed increased light on the remaining places in which institutional racism still lurks.

“We note that the recent confluence of events, movements and political activism has had an impact on our actions; however, these are issues that go back to the founding of the University of Minnesota prior to statehood,” said Chairman Larsen, “It is time we talk and educate each other. In spite of our past, we are hopeful for a future of partnership and mutual respect.”

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#### **About the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council**

In Minnesota there are seven Anishinaabe (Chippewa, Ojibwe) reservations, including Grand Portage, Bois Forte, Red Lake, White Earth, Leech Lake, Fond du Lac, and Mille Lacs; and four Dakota (Sioux) communities, including Shakopee Mdewakanton, Prairie Island, Lower Sioux, and Upper Sioux. The mission of the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council is to protect the sovereignty of the eleven Minnesota tribes and ensure the wellbeing of all American Indian citizens throughout the state of Minnesota. Learn more at [www.mn.gov/indianaffairs](http://www.mn.gov/indianaffairs).