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Item No.: 1

Testimony before the Rules Committee of the Los Angeles City Council Communication from the Public
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COLUMBUS DAY CELEBRATES GENOCIDE, INSTEAD LOS ANGELES SHOULD RECOGNIZE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY IN OCTOBER

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Tlanextilihqueh totahuan, tonahuan, to nihuan ihuan to huehuetquemeh.
Good morning brothers and sisters, and ancestor guardians of these lands.

My name is Marcos Aguilar Huitziliztli Kuahtzin (Azteca Mexicano). I am the Executive Director Tlayecantzi of the ONLY indigenous community-based autonomous school in the county of Los Angeles, California, Anahuacalmecac International University Preparatory. Our school is located in *nican chanehqueh* Gabrielino Tongva territory, now known as Los Angeles - formerly Otsuungna.

We applaud the members of this committee, and the President of the Los Angeles City Council for addressing the valid concerns of Indigenous Peoples and joining the international community's recognition of the urgency of ending all forms of racial discrimination. Indigenous Peoples have called for this recognition and redress internationally, and it is only fitting and timely that Los Angeles, as a city with global impact, respond positively to end all forms of discrimination against Indigenous Peoples here and across the country.

In particular, we call upon this committee to recognize the implicitly racist nature of the continued celebration of Columbus Day as a holiday memorializing the invasion the continents now known as North and South America and the ongoing systematic genocide perpetrated against Indigenous Peoples in the name of the Doctrine of Discovery to this day. Today, we seek truth and reconciliation around the legacy of Cristobal Colon - Columbus. The documented, undeniable, historical truth about this man is that he was a plunderer, a colonizer, a slave trader, a sex trafficker, and the all-powerful governing spearhead to the near extinction of the Taino Peoples who confronted him peacefully upon his arrival until his arrest by his own sovereign.

In the light of truth and towards reconciliation:

Recalling, that the 1965 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination defines the term "racial discrimination" as "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life,"

Recognizing, that the Legislature of the State of California adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples through Assembly Joint Resolution No. 42—Relative to indigenous peoples, [Filed with Secretary of State August 11, 2014.] which called “for increased awareness, sensitivity, and respect for issues of sovereignty related to the heritage of Native Americans and indigenous peoples,”

Further recognizing that AJR No. 42 also affirms that, “The “Doctrine of Discovery,” emanating from the European colonization after 1492 of the continents later to be known as the Americas, has had profound and lasting negative effects on the cultures and populations of the indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas;”

We call upon the City of Los Angeles to end the government sponsored and funded celebration of Columbus Day as a representation of the European colonization of the Americas, the genocide of Indigenous Peoples and the illegal expropriation of the lands and liberties of sovereign Peoples through illegitimate acts of war predicated upon the Doctrine of Discovery, the Monroe Doctrine and countless other illicit legal constructs.

Because we still exist, we make every day in Los Angeles, Indigenous Peoples Day. From Otsungna to Kuruvangna, and from Puvungna to Hahamongna, the City of Los Angeles is today a metropolis peopled by Indigenous communities in exile from around the country, the continent and the world. Samoan, Micronesian, Native Hawaiian, Polynesian and other Peoples indigenous to the lands in the Pacific Ocean, regularly renew ancestral bonds with Chumash and Tongva leaders. Tens of thousands of Zapoteca families throughout Los Angeles have for decades renewed rights and responsibilities to their pueblos in Oaxaca, Mexico even as they prepare for basketball tournaments in South Los Angeles or quinceaneras in Mid-City. Kiche and Kaqchikel Mayan interpreters, leaders and fire keepers in the highlands of Highland Park renew ancestral bonds with living guides in time and space which overcome geopolitical borders and span eons of keeping time with the precise accuracy of the cosmos. Azteca Mexicanos turn the streets of Los Angeles into the corridors of Tenochtitlan and Teotihuacan and neighborhood parks are transformed into the inner sanctums of inner-city Indigenous culture almost every day throughout the city through Aztec Cultural-Warrior Dance Societies. Dakota and Akimel O’otham spiritual leaders guide men and women back to health from the real effects of historical trauma and state violence. Children in public schools to this day often face the taunting of the school yard bully mocking the “indio pata-rajada” or “split-foot Indian” and the textbook eulogy of a vanishing race.

The urban context survived by transnational communities of indigenous peoples is one survived by youth and children under such duress that local educational authorities have declared the state of life of mostly all inner city youth as one akin to post-traumatic stress syndrome. Indigenous youth and children in particular bear the burden of these realities as they lack individual autonomy over their lives as minors and they collectively lack access to the resources necessary to overcome challenges they face.

In Los Angeles, over 224 languages are spoken today of which dozens are indigenous languages including Nahuatl-Mexicano, our language, which is represented by dozens of regional varieties spoken today throughout Aztlan, Mexico, El Salvador and Nicaragua. Over a million indigenous children attend Los Angeles public schools of which the vast majority are of Latin American origin - besides Zapotecas, Mayas and Aztecas, there are Yoreme (Yaquis), Purepechas, Coras, Wixaritari, Kichua, Quechua, not to mention the citizens of dozens federally recognized tribes including Navajo, Tohono O'otham, Cherokee and Lakota-Dakota-Nakota due to the atrocities of 20th century forced relocation policies the City of Los Angeles benefitted from. Yet, as an example of the impact of overly restrictive policies which ignore the existence of indigenous children, in Los Angeles Unified School District, of over 650,000 students, *slightly over 900 (nine hundred) children were recognized as Native American in 2015.*

The State of California, is traditional territory to over two hundred sovereign indigenous nations, and is home to hundreds of indigenous languages from throughout the Americas yet often these remain invisible, without regard to internationally affirmed rights to education, language and culture. Certainly, the impact of the Doctrine of Discovery upon indigenous children today and the languages they speak or are prevented from speaking by the policies, pedagogies, curricula and personnel of public schooling remains as the single most defining commonality among all indigenous children, their families and communities, CAUSING A DE FACTO STATE OF NONEXISTENCE, DISAPPEARANCE & FORCED ASSIMILATION.

This year, in Standing Rock Sioux treaty lands, the world again witnessed the bulldozing of the rights of Indigenous Peoples, our lands, our memory and our testimony. This bulldozing began in 1492 when the military expedition of Cristobal Colon first landed upon the shores of the Arawaka Peoples homelands only to plow through these sovereign peoples and sever life and limb from their inalienable rights to humanity. What kind of holiday teaches children to celebrate invasion, plunder, slavery and the wholesale negation of the humanity of an entire hemisphere full of People?

Official recognition of the living and ancestral Indigenous Peoples who represent important communities in the City of Los Angeles through the establishment of Indigenous Peoples Day on October 12th as an official city holiday would advance internationally reaffirmed calls to recognize, "the value and diversity of the cultures and the forms of social organization of the world's indigenous people," in our city-home today.

As such, we urge this Committee to adopt a resolution in favor of establishing Indigenous Peoples' Day as an act towards "eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms and promoting understanding among all races" without delay.

Date: 12/20/16

Indigenous Peoples Day Fact Sheet Submitted in rules Committee

Council File No: 154343

Item No.: 1

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Why the City of LA should abolish Columbus Day

1) Christopher Columbus did not discover America.
When Christopher Columbus landed in the Caribbean in 1492, there were already millions of Indigenous people living in the Americas. Traditionalists, elders and creation stories of Indigenous Peoples say that our peoples were here since the beginning of time. Conservative estimates by scientists indicate that there were approximately 25 million Indigenous peoples in the Americas between 14,000-45,000 years prior to Columbus. It's also a well-documented fact that Christopher Columbus was not the first European to set foot in the Americas.

2) From his own writings, Columbus was a brutal murderer.
"Endless testimonies ... prove the mild and pacific temperament of the natives," his men wrote, "but our work was to exasperate, ravage, kill, mangle and destroy." His offenses were so great that he was taken back to Europe in chains, where he was tried for his crimes against humanity.

3) Columbus was a slave trader.
Columbus was the first slave trader in the Americas. He began by trading Indigenous peoples, and as the native population was decimated they were replaced with black slaves. As part of that slave trade, he supervised the selling of native girls into sexual slavery. Young girls of the ages 9 to 10 were the most desired by his men, he writes in his diaries.

4) Columbus was a made up hero from the 1930s.
Columbus Day, as we know it in the United States, was invented by the Knights of Columbus, a Catholic fraternal service organization. In the 1930s, they were looking for a Catholic hero as a role-model their kids could look up to. The holiday was enacted in 1934, a time when Native Americans didn't have rights, including the right to vote in most states. 1934 was also a time when Jim Crow laws were still on the books, well before the civil rights movement.

5) To continue to celebrate Columbus causes psychological harm to Native American children and youth.
The American Psychological Association and other professional organizations have conducted studies on the effects of exposure to demeaning and diminishing symbols, images and messages – such as race-based mascots and holidays such as Columbus Day – and have found that this exposure severely erodes Native American children and youth self worth and self image.

Native youth suffer amongst the worst outcomes of all youth across the country, and have a suicide rate three times the national average. It is irresponsible for any municipality to sponsor a holiday that damages the psychological health of children and youth.

Why the City of LA should establish Indigenous Peoples Day

- 1) **Los Angeles is on Indigenous Land:** Tongva, Tataviam, and Chumash nations have been in what is now the City of Los Angeles since time immemorial, yet still are not adequately recognized as its first peoples. It is critical that Native Americans are recognized for their contribution to the development of the City but also to acknowledge how it happened and what the consequences have been to local Indigenous people and their culture.
- 2) **Los Angeles is home to the largest Indigenous population in the country:** LA County is home to well over 500,000 Indigenous Peoples – including citizens of more than 200 North American Tribal nations; dozens of Indigenous tribes from Mexico, Central and South America; and Indigenous peoples from Asia and the Pacific, including Maori, Hawaiians, and Samoans, among other Indigenous peoples from throughout the world. Given its diversity of Indigenous peoples, Los Angeles City is home to one of the largest and most diverse Indigenous populations in the country.
- 3) **Indigenous peoples are building a movement across the country, that seeks recognition, reconciliation and equity:** The current national trend is that more and more cities are honoring Native Americans-Indigenous Peoples by replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day, including Albuquerque, New Mexico; Portland, Oregon; St. Paul, Minnesota; Bexar County, Texas; Traverse City, Michigan; Olympia, Washington; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Seattle, Washington; San Fernando, California; Santa Cruz, California; Sebastopol, California; Denver, Colorado; Phoenix, Arizona; and the states of Vermont and Minnesota.
- 4) **Consistent with international and national policy:** Establishing Indigenous Peoples Day is also a part of an international movement to end racism and discrimination of Indigenous peoples. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) – calls for signatory nations “to promote understanding” amongst all peoples. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – which calls on the nations of the world to “promote understanding and good relations among Indigenous peoples and all other segments of society.”

Commonly asked Questions

- 1) Why can't we celebrate both days?

Celebrating Christopher Columbus means celebrating his actions, which include the murder, rape, torture and enslavement of Indigenous Peoples. You cannot celebrate Indigenous Peoples while concurrently celebrating their murder and dehumanization.

- 2) Why can't Indigenous Peoples celebrate on another day in the year?

Indigenous Peoples Day has been celebrated on the second Monday of October since the early 1970s, as an act of remembrance. Replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous

Peoples Day is an act of reconciliation, which uncovers the truth of the holiday. It is an act of recognizing that there has been a large erasure of Indigenous Peoples histories in this country, and this change is a step towards reconciling the marginalization and invisibility of Indigenous communities and issues. It is an important action that recognizes the historic wrongs that have been committed against Indigenous Peoples. In addition, Indigenous Peoples Day has been established in dozens of cities nationally on October 12 or the second Monday in October. Los Angeles should not set the precedent of choosing a different time of year for this important celebration.

3) Aren't Native Americans marginalizing Italian Americans in the same way they are asking not to be marginalized?

Abolishing Columbus Day has nothing to do with the Italian American community. The abolishment of Columbus Day is about one man alone: Christopher Columbus. The Indigenous Community values the contributions of Italian American heritage, culture and leaders, and believe that Italian history and culture can still be honored without celebrating the murder and enslavement of Indigenous Peoples. There are also many Italian Americans that do not want to associate the celebration of their heritage with Columbus. Many of these Italian Americans have testified before the LA City Council on this matter, and fully support replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day on the second Monday of October.

Resources/Citations:

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