

Declaration of Indian Purpose

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Annotation: Beginning with the founding of the National Congress of American Indians in 1944, Native Americans established national organizations to demand a greater voice in determining their own destiny. In 1961, some 700 Indians from sixty-four tribes met in Chicago to attack termination and formulate an Indian political agenda and a shared declaration of principles.

Document: ...We, the Indian People, must be governed by principles in a democratic manner with a right to choose our way of life. Since our Indian culture is threatened by presumption of being absorbed by the American society, we believe we have the responsibility of preserving our precious heritage....

We believe in the inherent right of all people to retain spiritual and cultural values, and that the free exercise of these values is necessary to the normal development of any people....

We believe that the history and development of America show that the Indian has been subjected to duress, undue influence, unwarranted pressures, and policies which have produced uncertainty, frustration, and despair....

What we ask of America is not charity, not paternalism, even when benevolent. We ask only that the nature of our situation be recognized and made the basis of policy and action.

Source: *American Indian Chicago Conference*, University of Chicago, June 13-20, 1961, 5-6.