



### **Advancement of Indigenous Opportunity**

A movement for worldwide Indigenous solidarity officially took root during a Wisdom of the People Forum, September 15-18, 2002, in Washington DC. Americans for Indian Opportunity [www.aio.org](http://www.aio.org) and the Advancement of Maori Opportunity [www.amo.co.nz](http://www.amo.co.nz) convened leaders from a variety of backgrounds and geographical regions to begin forging links of global Indigenous cooperation.

AIO and AMO share a commitment to grassroots empowerment and two strong programs for achieving it. The first is their award-winning Ambassadors program that enables existing and emerging Indigenous leaders to be positive and proactive change agents. The rationale behind this program is expressed by AIO founder, LaDonna Harris: *“By empowering leadership with a firm cultural identity, we can withstand the forces of globalization and even more importantly, contribute our Indigeneity.”* The second, the Indigenous Leadership Interactive System (ILIS™), enfold computer interaction in a dialogue/design process that is congenial to traditional Indigenous decision-making.

The challenge facing this Forum was to lay the groundwork for an expanding web of transnational, grassroots Indigenous cooperation. The leaders opened their deliberations sitting in the traditional Comanche circle sharing their “medicine”—their sources of inner strength and personal power—principally based on respect for the Earth, ancestors, family, and peaceful co-existence.

Using ILIS, they then considered the obstacles that stand in the way of worldwide cooperation and

generated 89 barriers. In structured dialogue and in the spirit of participatory democracy, they identified not only the barriers that they deemed most important but also those whose overcoming would exert the most leverage in overcoming the other barriers. They identified a lack of Indigenous shared vision as the deepest barrier to their worldwide cooperation.

Other barriers with deep leverage (identified as needs to be addressed) were:

- To increase respect for Indigenous peoples, cultures, and diversity;
- To understand the impact of globalization;
- To increase economic and political participation;
- To increase asset and resource base;
- For a coordinating agency in the global context; and
- To overcome the reality that Indigenous nations are in different places and spaces.

The leaders proceeded to identify actions that would address these needs, to generate action scenarios in small groups, and to draft an action plan endorsed by everyone for moving ahead on transnational Indigenous cooperation.

This three-day Forum/Co-Laboratory was a collaborative effort of AIO, AMO, and the Institute for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Agoras (AGORAS). The W.K. Kellogg Foundation funded it. For a complete report on this Forum, click: [www.iss-conference.org](http://www.iss-conference.org); click Resources and then A Wisdom of the People Forum. Future Forums are being planned for El Salvador, Morocco, and Crete (during the ISSS conference).

## Honors for LaDonna

LaDonna Harris, board member, founder and president of Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO) for 33 years, stepped down as AIO Director in August triggering outbursts of appreciation. At the grand powwow sponsored by the National Museum of the American Indian, on September 14, she was given a special honoring ceremony.

Four days later, after the Wisdom of the People Forum, at a Generations of Leadership Gala, she was joined by 300 of her closest friends and supporters,



government and Indian leaders from around the country, who shared stories of her tireless commitment, energy, and warmth. During the gala, a slide presentation ran showing her life and her long involvement in Indian and human rights movements, including photos with every first family from the Kennedys to the Clintons.

A short bio of LaDonna can be found at [www.iss-conference.org/committee.htm](http://www.iss-conference.org/committee.htm).

### Crete 2003

The Institute for 21<sup>st</sup> Century *Agoras* has close ties to the 47<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the International Society for the Systems Sciences (ISSS; Crete 2003) and its theme: *Conscious Evolution of Humanity: Using Systems Thinking to Construct Agoras of the Global Village*. Our President, Aleco Christakis, is also this year's president of ISSS; our Executive Director, Ken Bausch, is co-chair of the conference along with Aleco.



People like Ludwig von Bertalanffy, Kenneth Boulding, and Anatol Rappaport founded ISSS in 1954 as the Society for General Systems Research. Its distinguished presidents are a Who's Who of the outstanding systems scientists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including Margaret Mead, James Miller, Stafford Beer, Heinz von Foerster, Harold Odum, Bela Banathy, Ilya Prigogine, and Ervin Laszlo.

The recently released Call for Papers see [www.iss-conference.org](http://www.iss-conference.org) reveals the very practical bent of Crete 2003. Three Co-Laboratories are scheduled so far. In addition to the Indigenous Forum, there are ones on "Dialogos en las Calles de Paisajes en Crisis" and "Greek Culture in a Global World." One group has the theme "One Year after Johannesburg" assessing movement toward sustainable development and advancing grassroots ways to make an equitable, humane, and environmentally sound world society. Another group is considering "Participatory design and planning: potential and pitfalls for ethical governance." In addition, Markus Schwaninger and Allenna Leonard are leading Syntegrity sessions on "The Future of ISSS," thus taking to heart Mead's long-ago suggestion that systems scientists should "use their theory to predict the kind and size of the society they wanted."

A flyer describing Crete 2003 is appended at the end of this message. Full details on the conference are available at the above website.

### Co-Laboratories of Democracy

Co-laboratories streamline participatory democracy so that it functions effectively among diverse stakeholders in complex situations. They (like ILIS) are adaptations of Interactive Management

(IM; also CogniScope) methodology, which has been refined and successfully applied for over 20 years in corporate, government, and international arenas. They simplify IM for the use of non-profit organizations and community groups in sessions that:

- Authenticate every stakeholder/ participant;
- Elicit ideas and points of view from all stakeholders;
- Move toward effective consensus;
- Elicit and deal with the different priorities of stakeholder participants;
- Equalize power relations among the stakeholders;
- Go beyond identifying factors that are important, to specifying those that are most influential in achieving goals.

Co-laboratories (and IM) generate focus, consensus, and effective action. In two days, they move groups to higher levels of functioning. In addition to their tangible benefits for people and the organizations that serve them, co-laboratories provide full documentation and transparency. We have on file hundreds of reports on successful IM interventions. IM is the best design-making system that there is. *AGORAS* makes it available to people who are trying to make a difference.

A brief summary of this process, including a PowerPoint presentation can be found at [www.globalagoras.com](http://www.globalagoras.com). Extensive documentation is available at [www.cwaltd.com](http://www.cwaltd.com).

### **Institute for 21<sup>st</sup> Century *Agoras***

The Institute for 21<sup>st</sup> Century *Agoras* (*AGORAS*) is a volunteer-driven 501(c)(3) charitable organization that promotes vigorous democracy. It revives the spirit of the ancient Greek *agoras* for the age of globalization. With its Co-Laboratories of Democracy, it streamlines participatory democracy, making it efficient and transparent. Its mission is to employ these co-laboratories in complex situations

with diverse groups of willing stakeholders to jump start new or stalling democratic processes. In this way, it aims to spread *agoras* around the world.

The *immediate* criteria of evaluation are the abilities of co-laboratories to draw together the relevant stakeholders of a situation, elicit a comprehensive list of responses to a well-devised triggering question, generate consensus on the deep parameters of the situation, and produce effective action plans. *Mid-term* results are measured in the extent that participants and their constituencies follow through on the action plans generated in the co-laboratories. *Long-term* results are measured in the vitality of the participating groups and their effectiveness in influencing problematic situations.

Co-laboratories require preparatory field work to interview stakeholder groups and compose a paper presenting their various views, to draft the proper triggering question, to obtain and set up the proper meeting room, computer projection equipment, etc. They require a minimum three-person team for two-plus days. They require a large expenditure of time and effort from *AGORAS* staff, facilitators, and local personnel. *AGORAS* works on a tight budget, but still needs \$15,000 to \$25,000 for each co-laboratory, depending on the size and complexity of the situation, travel, lodging, etc.

Grassroots organizations seldom have the resources to cover that expense. For that reason, we seek sponsorship from foundations, corporations, and individuals.

If your organization is having growing pains or is faced with many complex problems all at once, you might want to contact *AGORAS*. If you want to sponsor a favorite organization for rejuvenation, we would like to hear from you. You might want to contribute to our work. (You can contribute online and your donations are tax-deductible.) You just might want to find out more. In any case, go to [www.globalagoras.org](http://www.globalagoras.org) and click the Get Involved menu tab. **We would like to hear from you**

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