

MEDIA RELEASE



Sunday, April 27, 2025

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MATAWA YOUTH SPEAK AT UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

THUNDER BAY, ON: Led by two members of the Matawa First Nations Management (MFNM) Board of Directors, a delegation of Matawa First Nations youth made a statement about Indigenous rights and resource development at the [24th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues](#) (UNPFII) in New York City, the traditional territory of the Lenape People. They attended the first week of the forum from April 21 to 25, 2025.

It's the second time MFNM youth participated in international activities, which included meetings with Ambassador Bob Rae, Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations in New York. This year's delegation included Landon Yellowhead, Sienna Wabasse, and Mercedes Sofea from Nibinamik First Nation. Participation was supported by the MFNM Board of Directors and the Matawa Chiefs Council.

On April 23, 2025, Landon and Sienna made a [statement](#) at the forum during the thematic dialogue on the financing of Indigenous Peoples' work and participation across the multilateral and regional system. Some of the issues raised in their statement included:

- Reminder to Canada and the Province of Ontario that their economies are based on accessing the critical minerals, precious metals, and energy sources of our territory.
- The development of the Matawa territory, including the Ring of Fire, is expected to be a nation-building economic boom to Canada, as outlined in Ontario's proposed Bill 5, *Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act*, 2025, aimed at securing a strategic national mineral supply chain.
- The lands and resources of the Matawa territory are subject to the James Bay Treaty No. 9 signed in 1905-06 and 1929-30.
- It is time for meaningful Treaty implementation that includes the recognition of the sovereignty and rights of our people.

The delegation called for all nations represented at the U.N. forum to monitor how the governments of Ontario, Canada and the United States may proceed to unilaterally access the territory, lands, resources and wealth that has been entrusted to us without free, prior and informed consent.

During the trip, the Matawa youth delegation met with Ambassador Bob Rae and attended a youth-led roundtable he hosted during the U.N. Forum. The youth were also invited to have breakfast with the Ambassador at his official residence, alongside Indigenous leaders like Willie Littlechild and Ontario Regional Chief Abram Benedict. Later in the week, the delegation had the opportunity to visit Washington, D.C., to see the nation's capital and its sights, including the White House, the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument.

QUOTES

"It was nerve wracking to speak at the United Nations forum, but I felt good about it in the end. I was glad to represent Nibinamik First Nation on an international stage. It helped me find my voice. My favourite part of the trip has been meeting new people like Ambassador Bob Rae."

—Sienna Wabasse, Nibinamik First Nation Youth Delegate

"They really brought a rez kid out here. I never thought I'd be in New York speaking at the United Nations and I'm grateful for the opportunity to contribute my voice to these larger discussions. If I can do it, other young people can too. It's been special to meet people from Indigenous nations like Blackfoot, Navajo and Innu, and also Ambassador Bob Rae."

—Landon Yellowhead, Nibinamik First Nation Youth Delegate

"I felt really lucky to be at the United Nations to see and hear from Indigenous people from around the world. I felt like I was dreaming. I was giddy when I was landing in New York, the glittering lights looked so pretty. It was breathtaking."

—Mercedes Sofea, Nibinamik First Nation Youth Delegate

"It was a privilege to attend the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues with youth from Nibinamik. I was proud to witness our Matawa youth, Landon and Sienna, speak at the forum. Their eagerness to speak is an inspiration for all ages. It was insightful to hear about the challenges other Indigenous communities are facing globally, and how similar they are to our Matawa First Nations. In spite of the tensions between our countries, our experience visiting the U.S. was welcoming and pleasant."

—Rosemary Moonias, Matawa First Nations Management President

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