

Standing in Solidarity for Sk'aliCh'elh-tenaut

Two members of the Lummi Nation, Squil-le-he-le and Tah-Mahs, are working to bring Sk'aliCh'elh-tenaut home.

In August of 1970, Sk'aliCh'elh-tenaut was violently stolen from her home and family in the Salish Sea. September 24th will mark 50 years of her being imprisoned in a painfully small tank at the Miami Seaquarium, where she is the star attraction and forced to perform daily.

The Lhaq'temish people of the Lummi Nation are Indigenous peoples on the coast of northern Washington and southern British Columbia. "Sk'aliCh'elh-tenaut," is a member of Sk'aliCh'elh, the resident family of orcas who call the Salish Sea home. The Lummi term for "orca" is "qwe'lhol'mechen," which means "our relatives under the water." The Lummi and their qwe'lhol'mechen have lived in community with one another since time immemorial and teachings indicate not only deep cultural and spiritual connections between qwe'lhol'mechen and the Lummi people, but also kinship bonds. The Lummi Nation never consented to, and was never even informed of, her abduction.

Today, the lasting effects of a colonialism that decimated both Indigenous and orca populations in the Pacific Northwest, is being felt culturally and environmentally. While the release of Sk'aliCh'elh-tenaut would be justice for her, it would also be a justice for Indigenous Peoples of the Salish Sea, because at the heart of this matter lies a great disconnect between culture and law that must be rectified. Sk'aliCh'elh-tenaut's taking and prolonged holding at the Seaquarium, is a direct violation of rights defined under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to:

- maintain distinct social and cultural institutions;
- redress for any action which has the aim or effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities;
- manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies;
- maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures;
- participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights;
- maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard; and (amongst others)
- access to and prompt decision through just and fair procedures for the resolution of conflicts and disputes with States or other parties, as well as to effective remedies for all infringements of their individual and collective rights. Such a decision shall give due

consideration to the customs, traditions, rules and legal systems of the indigenous peoples concerned and international human rights.

The undersigned peoples stand in solidarity with Squil-le-he-le and Tah-Mahs, and call on the Miami Seaquarium to bring Sk'aliCh'elh-tenaut home! The Miami Seaquarium and its owners must recognize the Indigenous rights of her Lummi relatives. The Lummi people are one of the original inhabitants of Washington state's northern coastal region and view the Southern Resident Orcas as family members whose history, experiences, and fate are beautifully interconnected with their own.

***ATNI [Resolution #18 - 32](#): Tokitae, The Southern Resident Killer Whale Population, And The Salish Sea: Our Sacred Obligation; The Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indian (over 60 tribes of the Pacific Northwest) supported a resolution that calls for the release and return Sk'aliCh'elh-tenaut

***UNDRIP: https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf