

# Brian C. McK Henderson

## Excerpts from “Charter for Change: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Approach”

Keynote address at honoring ceremony for Honoring Nations 2002, Bismarck, North Dakota, June 18, 2002.

By Brian C. McK Henderson (Apache)

To talk of moving forward does not mean to disengage from the past. Sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski who spent 35 years laboring on his Crazy Horse memorial carving in the Black Hills just south of here, once said *“When the legends die, the dreams end; when the dreams end, there is no more greatness.”* What Ziolkowski understood is that to build a brighter future we must first preserve all we can of our past, not just the legends, but our culture, our beliefs, our identity, everything that we are now and have always been. Our heritage is our foundation.

In moving forward, Indian nations must first acknowledge the challenges they face and recognize that many of these challenges, we can resolve ourselves. One of the abiding joys of the Honoring Nations program is that it has shown us how easily homegrown ideas and initiatives can develop into measurable and sustainable solutions.

In a world scarred by terrorism and spiraling religious and cultural tension, a world in which the gulf between the “haves” and “have nots” grows wider, a world still wary of globalization and its impact, you ask, “how can we hope for positive changes?” What relevance do the events around us have on Indian country? As a result, are we further marginalised?

These were some of the themes and concerns voiced in New York last month at the first meeting of a new UN body: the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which represents the world’s 300 million indigenous peoples. This forum gave substance to a truth that many of us know. While the needs and priorities of indigenous people around the world may differ widely, feelings of being marginalised, of being the poorest of the poor, of being victims of discrimination and inequality are, in many cases, very much the same.

At the forum, the UN Secretary, General Kofi Annan spoke of the values indigenous people have to offer to the rest of the world, in areas of traditional knowledge, sustainable development, environmental custodianship and collective rights. The traditions he found particularly powerful were “the respect given to elders as carriers of wisdom, to women as carriers of language and culture, and to children as carriers of the identity that is transmitted to future generations.”

The extraordinary advances in technology and communications have not, in fact, alleviated some of the most basic inadequacies in our social order. Despite better communication tools, the world seems to be getting worse rather than better at improving dialogue across borders, regions, states and peoples. By bringing the world closer together, so that news of a major event on the other side of the world may reach us within minutes, advanced technology and communication makes us feel more exposed, more vulnerable, and less safe.

Within such a world it is easy to feel that the marginalised can only become more so. But, it is my fervent belief the reverse is true. The more fragile the world around us appears to be, the more unreliable any single system or constituency is, the more compelling is the need to seize the initiative and to take charge

of our futures. This is not a radical idea. Others around the world are doing this, seizing the time and the opportunity to demand an equal place at the table.

By collectively taking control of our future, by sharing experiences and empowering our youth, we can influence change and achieve real, measurable improvements for our future generations. We cannot expect our problems to disappear overnight, but with the right leadership, the right discussions, and the right focus we can address these issues and create a better world for us all.

*Brian Henderson is Vice Chairman of Merrill Lynch Europe, Middle East, and Africa.*