UNITED CONFEDERATION OF TAÍNO PEOPLE

June 18th 2003

U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
Oversight Hearings on Sacred Places Protection
Washington, DC

Statement on behalf of the United Confederation of Taíno People:

Mr. Chairman, distinguished representatives and all our relations, it is with great respect that I offer a humble greeting on behalf of the United Confederation of Taíno People (UCTP). We are greatly appreciative of this opportunity to submit testimony to you on the issue of the protection of endangered Sacred Places. We commend your sincere efforts to seek a better understanding of why we consider this issue an urgent priority not only for our present but also for our future generations.

Mr. Chairman, as the Taíno People were the first Indigenous Peoples of the Western Hemisphere to be identified as “American Indians”, we consider it our responsibility to support the initiatives of our northern relatives whenever possible, particularly when they seek to make a better world for our children. With this in mind, we would like to express our solidarity with the Sacred Places Protection Coalition who are working to highlight the importance of this issue for all our Nations. We would also like to commend and support the National Congress of American Indians on their recent Resolution #SD-02-018, entitled “Protection of Threatened Sacred Places: An Urgent Priority.” We view these initiatives with the utmost respect and we are honored to bring further attention to them during this hearing process.

As Taíno People, it is important for us to express to you that our physical & spiritual connection to our homelands has been and continues to be a sacred covenant, which we entered into with our Creator at the beginning of time – long before the establishment of the United States of America. Indeed, our ancestral homelands and traditional use areas extended from the Caribbean Islands where Columbus first encountered us, to the southern tip of the State of Florida, which we call in our ancient language “Bimini”.

Today, the issue of our Sacred Places as well as our Ancestral Remains, is a priority issue for our Tribal communities. On the island of Borikén (Puerto Rico) for example, we are engaged in an active campaign to bring this issue to the attention of Governor Sila María Calderón and the government of Puerto Rico as well as the various and relevant agencies and departments of the government of the United States of America. We are therefore not only using this opportunity to inform you of our activities but also to seek your support for a resolution of our concerns in the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

Recognizing the longstanding relationship between the governments of the United States of America and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, we urge this Commission to give full consideration to the integration and active participation of the indigenous people of the island of Puerto Rico in all present and future initiatives concerning the protection of our endangered Sacred Places as well as our cultural property rights and religious freedom. As Indigenous Peoples who have a verifiable connection to the U.S. mainland as well as the island of Puerto Rico, we the Taíno People should be afforded every consideration and remedy, which is available to other Native American Tribes, Alaska Native Tribal governments, and Native Hawaiians.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates and all our relations, we would once again like to say bo’matum (thank you) for this opportunity. We sincerely look forward to any and all opportunities to positively work together toward a satisfactory resolution to these important and other issues.

In the Spirit of our Ancestors,

Roberto Múcaro Borrero,
President, United Confederation of Taíno People
UCTP - U.S. Regional Coordinating Office

CC: Hon. Governor Sila Maria Calderón (Puerto Rico); Hon. Luis Gutierrez, Hon. Nydia Velázquez; Hon. José Serrano; Hon. Anibal Acevedo-Vila; Hon: Hillary R. Clinton; Hon. Charles E. Schumer; National Puerto Rican Coalition; National Congress of American Indians