

EARTHKEEPER HERO: **CHIEF OREN LYONS**

by Aibanrihun Lyngdoh

"The environment isn't over here. The environment isn't over there. You are the environment," says Chief Oren Lyons, one of the most striking figures at the Global Environmental Youth Convention. A Canadian Indian of about sixty-nine years of age, he has long grey hair, brownish black eyes, strong Indian facial features, a conditioned physique and he stands about five feet nine inches tall. He now lives in Onondaga, in New York state and belongs to the Wolf Clan, one of six clans of the Hautenosauna Nation.

According to Chief Oren Lyons, he and his clansmen are committed to care for the Earth just as the Earth cares for them. They offer thanksgiving ceremonies for the sun, moon, fruits, vegetables, corn, etc. They respect and honour the Earth and what it gives us all.

"If you have a clean environment, you will have a healthy atmosphere," he says. "This will make you happy and your happiness will bring joy to your parents and it will affect the community, too. Then there will be peace of mind to one and all."

Chief Lyons gave the introduction speech at the GEYC "Wildlife Day" in Hoor but was unhappy with the title. "In our nation there is no word for 'wild' only 'free' - 'freelife'. The animals are like us human beings. They take care of their young ones and teach them how to survive. We must appreciate them, cherish, protect and work with them," he said. "They are family."

The Chief felt that the cultural diversity of the 14- to 17-year-olds in Lund was the key to environmental solutions. "It is not a matter of color, it is the variety of people. You must keep your language and your ways. You must cherish them, hold them close. You should never give it up. Pass it on to the next generation."

Chief Lyons said he had a firm belief in the youth of today. They have a broad vision of hope and a commitment to the environment; they are full of energy and good spirit and are also influential. "The young generation can influence their elders and can make them understand the environmental problems that are faced by us today. The youth can make them see that our environment is deteriorating day by day," he said.

"Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world," he said, quoting a delegate from India. The Chief sincerely believed that the deforestation faced by Canada and the Amazon rain forest would be saved by the youth of today, for they are the ones who can make a difference.

"We the old people have reached the top of the mountain and are looking down at everyone but you the young ones are still climbing the mountain," he said.