

State Dept. adviser gives indigenous rights talk

Alumnus Ajay Bhatt, who graduated from the School of Law, spoke Monday at the Knight Law Center

By Sheldon Traver
Freelance Reporter

Ajay Bhatt, a U.S. Department of State Office of Multilateral Affairs adviser on human rights, spoke about indigenous peoples and human rights at the Knight Law Center Monday evening.

Bhatt, a 2001 University School of Law graduate, discussed draft declarations being written by the United Nations and the Organization of American States to ensure the rights of indigenous peoples worldwide. The

event was sponsored by the Wayne Morse Center for Law and Politics.

Bhatt, who just returned from Switzerland where he worked on the draft resolution for the United Nations, talked about the efforts of both the United Nations and OAS to adopt a resolution to allow greater rights for indigenous groups around the world. The proposal includes the right to preserve native language and to not be forced from ancestral lands.

"Indigenous peoples became a vital part of the declaration," Bhatt said. "These peoples had the same speaking rights on the floor of the chamber as nation-states."

He said it can be difficult to address so many points of view, but it is exciting to work toward a resolution.

"The U.S. is extremely legalistic and gets tagged as obstructionist, but we have to bear in mind we will have to sign on to what we agree to," he said.

He said he believes this draft will become a full resolution within several years, giving indigenous peoples around the world far more rights.

Not all who attended the lecture agreed with Bhatt's optimism about the draft resolution, however.

"It is the policy of the United States to do nothing for indigenous peoples in our own country," said Nikos Pastos, who said he's from the Salish and Kootenai Tribes of Montana.

Pastos said the U.S. has no interest in indigenous tribes unless there is an economic incentive, although he recognizes U.S. efforts to help indigenous

peoples elsewhere. He cited examples in his efforts to gain rights for Alaskan Indian tribes, saying native peoples of the United States want to see a specific document addressing their issues.

While Bhatt agreed there is no easy solution to the issue of indigenous rights, he said this is a step in the right direction.

"When (nation)-states see certain violations of human rights by member states, it causes other states to intervene — it becomes a name-and-shame game," Bhatt said, referring to the actions of member nations to keep others accountable.

Caroline Forell, School of Law professor and interim director of the Wayne Morse Center for Law and Politics, said Bhatt is amazed at the awareness of human rights issues in Eugene

and at the University. During a luncheon with law students Monday, he encouraged people to consider public service as part of their careers.

"People are really participating in human rights issues in Eugene," Forell said.

She said when Bhatt was her student, he wrote about "cultural and historical forces that hinder Indian American women."

"It was a wonderful paper and gave me incredible insight into his interest in human rights issues," she said.

Bhatt returned to Washington, D.C., Tuesday, but said Eugene will always hold a special place in his heart.

Sheldon Traver is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

COMMONS

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During the 2002-03 school year, the police received 13 burglary reports, while this school year 10 burglary reports already have been received by EPD.

Also, there have been two assaults reported this year during a five-month span, while only one was reported over the 10-month span last school year.

However, the number of reported rapes at University Commons has decreased since the 2002-03 school year. Two rapes were reported last school year, and no rapes have been reported so far this school year.

University Commons Assistant Manager Brian Piper said he was unaware that people may have a negative image of the complex as a high-crime area.

"As far as we know, people enjoy living here," Piper said. "If not, I'd hope they would express it. We're

always open to talking to any tenants that have a problem."

He said no tenants have expressed concerns to him about safety or crime.

Piper said some of the recent vandalism that has occurred at the complex, such as tire slashings in January and car windows being broken in February, may have been done by people who don't live at the complex, or even in the area.

Miller agreed non-tenants could be responsible for causing the damage, but said she has several neighbors who cause problems for her and her roommates.

She said she can hear neighbors through all of the walls in her apartment and the ceiling and floor.

"(The University Commons) is a very loud place to live in," Miller said.

She also said the smell of marijuana comes in through the windows, doors and the vent in the laundry room. She added that on Saturday and Sunday mornings, the ground outside her apartment is littered with

beer cans and bottles.

Miller said she would like to see more police patrols at the complex.

The University Commons does have its own security patrol, Piper said, although they don't wear identifiable clothing.

"They're walking around and checking out things, seeing if something is going on," he said, adding that he will look into getting something for them to wear to be more recognizable.

Piper said the University Commons takes several other security measures to help tenants feel secure, including well-lit parking lots, the complex's answering service and emergency alarms that connect to the police in each bedroom and living room.

"(Tenants) have 24-hour access to get a hold of somebody if there is some sort of problem," he said.

After the tire slashings in January, Piper said the staff at the apartment complex sent all of the tenants a flyer

UNIVERSITY COMMONS POLICE CALLS

Sept. 2002 - June 2003	Sept. 2003 - Jan. 2004
Assault: 1 reported	Assault: 2 reported
Burglary: 13 reported	Burglary: 10 reported
Criminal mischief: 7 reported	Criminal mischief: 11 reported
Minor in possession: 20 reported	Minor in possession: 16 reported
Theft: 9 reported	Theft: 6 reported
Theft from vehicle: 11 reported	Theft from vehicle: 3 reported
Theft of vehicle: 4 reported	Theft of vehicle: 2 reported

SOURCE: Eugene Police Department

reminding them of the emergency alarm system and the courtesy officer service.

Although Piper said he is not aware of an image problem at the complex, he hopes any concerns tenants may have will be brought to him.

"We're here to serve our tenants,"

Piper said. "I wish they felt free enough to come and tell us (their concerns) so we can be proactive and do something about it."

Contact the crime/health/safety reporter at lisacatto@dailyemerald.com.

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A unique opportunity for body modification enthusiasts to come together and talk with body piercers and tattoo artists from all over Oregon.

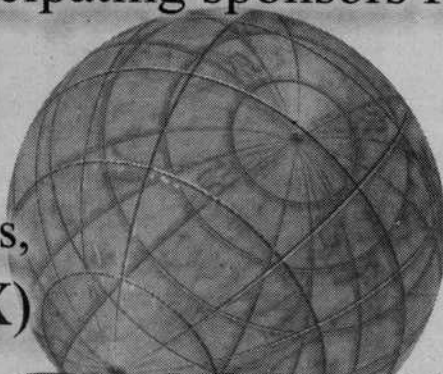
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9:00PM @ JOHN HENRY'S

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