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Responsibilities of the Bureau of Indian Affairs could be carried out with greater benefits to the Indian people if there were greater rapport between Federal and State governments and between the Indians and non-Indians of each community, Philleo Nash, Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, said today in Tucson, Ariz.

Commissioner Nash's comments were directed to representatives of labor, church groups, and government agencies attending a National Conference on Poverty in the Southwest which opened January 25.

“The war on poverty,” Commissioner Nash said, "gives us a starting point. It calls for community action, and clearly implies the need for cooperation among individuals and groups, not rivalry. For the Indian people this means that they must be willing to assume a more active part in the shaping of their own future. For the Bureau of Indian Affairs the time has come for us to work more closely with State and local governments. Let us resolve to abandon the all too-common practice of dissipating energy by engaging in fractionated projects."

The Indian Commissioner offered as an explanation for the chronic poverty besetting many reservation areas the growth of the “culture of poverty" in which lithe meaning of life has all but disappeared for many thousands of Indians since the days of the Indian wars.”

The results of the poverty culture, he continued, are these:

"Idleness becomes an acceptable way of life, dependency upon welfare appears to be a normal means of existence; resentment against constraint and authority becomes as natural as breathing.”

"A social system which includes these values and these techniques is nothing but the product of our own social, economic, and administrative failures" Commissioner Nash continued.

Outlining the greatly increased Bureau expenditures during the past four years to expand educational opportunities for Indians and hasten economic development of reservations to provide new sources of income from land that cannot support an agrarian economy, Mr. Nash added that Federal spending programs without changes in national attitudes cannot be fully effective.

"Although the Indian Bureau of today is a modern service agency, it is still viewed by some as a creature from whom the poor Indians must be rescued," Mr. Nash declared. He then added:

"But where can they go for the everyday services the Bureau alone provides? To the county for general welfare aid? Not often. To the County again for roads maintenance? To the county or State for medical assistance? Not usually. To the State or the school district for school buildings and buses? Often, here, too, the answer is 'no'.

"The Bureau of Indian Affairs provides for reservation Indians most of the major services that counties or States normally provide for other citizens.”

Commissioner Nash called the period of the 1960's the "overture" to the Great Society and called upon the conferees to "face social problems honestly.” One of these problems, he said is the existence of many different ethnic groups, among them the Indians, each of which deserves "consideration and help." The southwest he described as becoming a ”vital center" of the Nation and it must plan ahead, he said, for some “inevitable” changes in community life.