Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
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Indians can continue to maintain their tribal organizations and hold their lands in common for as long as they wish after termination of Federal trusteeship over their property and affairs, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Glenn L. Emmons said in a statement released today by the Department of the Interior.

He said widespread misinformation among Indians and the public could be corrected by a further congressional declaration of policy on the matter, and added that he plans to consult members of Congress about it soon.

The text of the Commissioner's statement follows:

"Recently there have been published comments that gave the mistaken impression that termination of Federal trusteeship over the lands of a particular Indian tribe means that the tribal lands must be sold off by the Government and the tribal organization will no longer be permitted to exist. Nothing could be further from the truth. Actually all the termination laws so far enacted--all the termination bills so far introduced on which this Department has reported favorably--have contained explicit provisions authorizing the affected Indians to continue holding their lands in common and maintaining a tribal organization after termination if they wish to do so. This can be done either through the formation of a corporation or similar organization under State law or through selection by the tribe of a nongovernmental trustee.

"This has been the policy actually followed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Department of the Interior and the Congress consistently since 1953. However, because there has been widespread misinformation and apprehension among the Indians on this matter, I believe it would be helpful if Congress could formalize this policy in some form of declaration at the next session. My intention is to consult with congressional members on this in the near future."