

EH-to-belgium-HS



European Union

**Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
Third Session
(Geneva, 12 - 16 July 2010)**

Statement by

**Mr Nicolas Fierens Gevaert
Attaché
Permanent Mission of Belgium to the
United Nations Office in Geneva
on behalf of the European Union**

Geneva, 14 July 2010

Check against delivery

Geneva, 14 July 2010

**Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
Third Session
(Geneva, 12 - 16 July 2010)**

EU Statement

Mr Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

I am making this statement on behalf of the European Union.

The EU is pleased to be able to address the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples for the first time.

The EU further congratulates you, Mr Chairperson, for your election as the chairperson of this Expert Mechanism. This mechanism is an important venue for providing the Council with relevant thematic expertise.

The European Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, equality and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. The EU is committed to these values, as well as to the combating of discrimination and social exclusion, both within Europe and in its relations with the wider world.

In concrete terms, in application of the powers conferred by the Treaties, the European Union has put in place within its borders a legal framework to fight discrimination, racism and xenophobia and launched financial programs to support activities aimed at combating these phenomena on the ground.

The European Union has made human rights a central aspect of its external relations: be it in the political dialogues it holds with third countries, be it in its action in multilateral fora such as the United Nations or in its development policy and assistance. Indigenous issues form an integral part of the European Union's human rights policy.

In a number of countries, indigenous peoples continue to be marginalized and discriminated against and many still live in poverty. Their voices are not always heard when economic development plans are formulated. During the past decades, the international community has gradually taken concrete steps to raise awareness of the situation of the world's indigenous peoples and to facilitate dialogue with their representatives. In this regard, the EU also attaches importance and closely follows the activities of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous People in relation to the promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development, as well as the work of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues that we were pleased to address for the first time last April.

Mr Chairperson,

The adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 has also advanced the rights and ensured the continued development of indigenous peoples around the world. Therefore, the EU particularly welcomes the opportunity for a general discussion on the Declaration during this session. We encourage States to facilitate its implementation by, inter alia, translating it into the languages of indigenous peoples in their respective countries in order to raise awareness among different actors of its provisions. At EU level, the principles of the European Union's engagement towards indigenous peoples are applied in the context of the aforementioned Declaration. Indigenous peoples' issues are mainstreamed into the European Commission's development cooperation strategies. For example, the EC Colombia Country Strategy Paper 2007-2013 addresses the humanitarian and human rights situation of indigenous population and includes among its key priorities peace building through the involvement of marginalized citizens in local governance and participatory economy.

This initiative can be seen as giving awareness to indigenous peoples' right to participation, as set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. As explained in the study undertaken by the Expert Mechanism, the principle of indigenous participation in decision-making still requires serious attention. In that regard, the EU is confident that the discussion that all interested stakeholders will have during this session on the draft progress report will contribute to finalize a comprehensive document for a better implementation of this principle. Indeed, effective participation of indigenous peoples in projects relating to their development needs to be based on their free prior and informed consent so as to further promote the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The European Union looks forward to the debate during this session of the Expert Mechanism.

Thank you.