

Sixth Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Joint Statement of the Arctic Caucus

United Nations' Headquarters

May 14-25, 2007

Item 4d: Education

Thank you Madame Chair,

My name is Patricia Cochran. I live in Alaska and, since July of last year, I have been the Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, which represents Inuit from Russia, Canada, Greenland, and the USA. I am also speaking on behalf of the Arctic peoples that are here today.

Inuit, like the Saami and like all indigenous peoples, have relied on their own education systems for thousands of years. We pass on our knowledge from one generation to the next. From our elders to our youth. And we do so through a complex system of family structures, through experiential mechanisms, and through reflection. The knowledge of our grandparents and their grandparents before them is gained by detailed observation of the environment, and a deep understanding of our social fabric.

We didn't call this process "education" before. I am unsure if we called it anything. It was simply the way knowledge was passed on. Today, some of us call it traditional knowledge. It's not a sufficient term, but it'll have to do. It's really about knowing, learning, and teaching.

Today's world is different but the principle of knowing, learning, and teaching is still very important. The "education" system we have in most parts of the Arctic now is a mix of what was brought to us from missionaries and colonizers and from what is often considered more traditional. Some of us have been more successful than others in adopting the good from what was offered to us, or more often, forced upon us.

Those that have been successful have never lost the understanding that it is us that must be central to any system of education that we might take on. Our youth need the support of their elders, but also of all those who play a role in the delivery of today's educational system. This includes the United Nations. UNESCO has a very specific mandate regarding education. And the right to develop our own systems is central to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted by the UN's Human Rights Council. May it also be adopted by the General Assembly shortly after the end of this year's Permanent Forum session.

Recommendations:

The indigenous peoples of the Arctic recommend to UN member states, UNESCO and other UN agencies with mandates related to education to:

- 1. support indigenous peoples in developing education systems that values indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and teaching;**
- 2. assist indigenous leaders in developing curricula anchored in traditional culture and values; and**
- 3. promote identity-based indigenous cultural educational initiatives.**