

WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS  
SECOND SESSION 8 to 12 AUGUST

Opening Statement

Mr. Chairman,

I wish to congratulate you for being elected as Chairman of the  
in  
Working Group on Indigenous Populations. This is fact the second year you  
serve in this capacity, as last year you lead this Group with great distinction  
as its Chairman Rapporteur in its very successful First Session. In that  
capacity you contributed then the kind of leadership needed by the Group  
at its initial session. The experience gained in the chair of this Working  
Group, added to that obtained in your distinguished career in the government of  
International Peace Research, in Oslo,  
your country and at the head of the reputed/Institute/will again prove to be  
an invaluable asset to the Working Group.

On behalf of the Secretary General of the United Nations I would like to  
welcome all persons present in the Conference Room, in particular the other  
members of this Group Mr. Ritter (Mrs Sousa, an alternate to Mr. Ritter this  
year as last year), Mr. Tovsevski, Mr. Mudawi and Mr. Saker (this year as last  
year, the alternate to Mr. Kaddour).

I also wish expressly to welcome the presence here of the representatives  
of the various governments which follow attentively the work of the Group; the  
representatives of the ILO and UNESCO, specialized agencies with special comp  
tence in several <sup>of</sup> the areas of work of the Group; and the representatives of the  
all of which  
non-governmental organizations, which have such important contributions to make  
to the work of the Group and its parent bodies.

Among the latter, special mention should be made of the organizations formed  
by and representing indigenous populations groups, peoples and nations. ←

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Their presence in this room, ~~together with the representatives of the relevant Governments~~ guarantees the success of this second session of this Working Group established precisely to receive their contributions to the dialogue that will help elucidate important aspects of their plight today.

This Working Group has attracted, since its inception, but particularly since its successful First Session last year, the attention of the public and the media. So much so that this year we have the presence of a television team in this room, which wishes to bring some of the meetings of the Group to the broader public that has access to video programmes every day more throughout the world.

The dialogue that this Working Group has made possible between governments of countries where indigenous populations live today and those indigenous populations is followed with keen interest by observers from governments and from inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations concerned with work under the mandate of this Working Group established pursuant to ECOSOC resolution 1982/34.

It seems appropriate to recall briefly that in paragraph 1 of that resolution the Council authorized the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to establish annually a working group on indigenous populations which shall meet for up to five working days before the annual sessions of the Sub-Commission in order to review developments pertaining to the promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous population including information requested by the Secretary-General annually from Governments specialized agencies, regional intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations in consultative status particularly those of indigenous peoples, to analyse such materials, and to submit its conclusions to the Sub-Commission bearing in mind the report of the Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission. In operative paragraph 2 of the same resolution, the Council decided that the Working Group "shall give special attention to the evolution of standards concerning the rights of indigenous populations, taking account of both the similarities and the differences in the situations and aspirations of indigenous populations throughout the world".

By virtue of this mandate the Working Group on Indigenous Populations has a very important and delicate role to play in United Nations activities dealing with the complex and involved issues that affect the lives of indigenous populations everywhere in the world. It is a known fact that indigenous populations are today among the most vulnerable sectors of society facing many problems stemming from the situation to which they have been reduced in many areas.

On the basis of the subjects established in the study of the problem of discrimination against indigenous populations and on statements made to the Group last year the Working Group listed in its report to the Sub-Commission on its First Session, the following matters as representing the main areas of concern for indigenous populations:

(a) right to life, to physical integrity and to security of the indigenous populations; (b) the right to self-determination, including the right to develop their own culture, traditions, language and way of life; (c) the right to freedom of religion and traditional religious practices; (d) the right to land and to natural resources; (e) civil and political rights; (f) the right to education; and (g) other rights, such as (i) right of association, (ii) right to social security and labour protection, (iii) right to legal assistance and protection in administrative and judicial affairs and (iv) right to trade and to maintain economic technological, cultural and social relations and exchange with other indigenous and non indigenous communities.

The mere listing of these areas already conveys some measure of the importance and scope of subject matters to be covered by the Working Group in its endeavours. Indeed, it is a difficult and delicate task that has been entrusted to the five experts from the Sub-Commission who in their personal capacity form this Working Group.

In closing may I be allowed to wish you all possible success in what I am sure will be a week full of hard work and successful discussions. Thank you  
Mr. Chairman.