

## WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

20<sup>TH</sup> SESSIONAGENDA ITEM ~~10~~ 6

Respected Chairman and members of the Working Group, my sisters and brothers, I wish to thank you for the privilege of once more addressing this august gathering. In my presentation to you I wish to express on behalf of my own organisation, on behalf of the indigenous peoples of the North East of India and indeed of the world the immense value that this forum has represented in our struggle for the realisation of the human rights of indigenous peoples.

I believe that I do not have to express this for the benefit of those present here, who are after all present because we all believe in the vital importance of the work being done here. However some of us may feel that after 20 years, it is important to review our output and effectiveness and also to perhaps see how we can develop further and improve ourselves to better serve the cause we are engaged here and in our work elsewhere, to represent.

There is much for this working group to do now. The end of the Decade is drawing near and still indigenous peoples are struggling, perhaps in changed situations and with different problems, with the issues perhaps of the destructive impact of globalisation and the hegemony of the market, against increasing violence and the authoritarianism of some states, with physical epidemics such as HIV or TB that threaten to exterminate us, indeed on many platforms, on an increasing range of issues and different forums.

There is only one platform that looks exclusively at the rights of our peoples on all these cross cutting thematic issues in a process that allows us collective voice at present, at the international level. That is this platform, this working group. I believe that under the dynamic leadership of our respected chairman, Dom Miguel Martinez and our honourable members of this working group, all these complex and critical issues will be discussed by our peoples themselves providing a conduit for the effective working of democratic principles at this very highest level of governance, the United Nations.

Everywhere on the huge range of concerns that impact on us, often negatively, indigenous peoples are struggling for our rights. Standards are being set on issues that did not exist

before, perhaps, or because there is a new perspective, an evolving perspective. This is true of standards on rights of children, of the non-human universe, on new technologies such as cloning and genetic modification of living creatures including ourselves. We know that when something is technologically possible, the likelihood is that it will become used as a method of doing things which impacts our societies deeply, changes our world. It is very important that there should be on-going activity that reviews these changing social and technical capacities of our world to ensure that it remains a human world where all peoples including all indigenous peoples without discrimination or exclusion can participate to direct and control these developments.

It is my humble suggestion to this Working Group that it should as a priority undertake a review of all standards existing or under development in the international system and examine them with a view to identify how they address the question of indigenous peoples rights, in which areas they comply with the developing standards on indigenous peoples, viz. the Draft Declaration and where and how they deviate from these standards. A list of country ratifications attached to each instrument will also be useful to enable this forum to effectively advocate on the relevant issue.

This exercise will also provide a clear indication of the status of indigenous peoples international legal position in different questions and aspects, and provide a base for development of a strategy for action on the development of standards.

Thank you for your kind attention