

**First Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
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**Statement by Aqqaluk Lyngé
President
Inuit Circumpolar Conference
May 20, 2002**

Item 6: Human Rights.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to share some remarks concerning human rights. As I noted in my comments last week under the General Debate, the ICC remains concerned about the path of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and in particular, Article 3. Now, I would like to introduce an issue that is of close personal concern to me and is directly relevant to the matter of the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination.

In September 1953, the Danish government, in a communication to the 5th Session of the Committee on Information from Non-Self Governing Territories, conveyed their unilateral decision to cease transmission of information on Greenland. The Danish government stated and I quote “the population has been mixed mainly with those of Scandinavian blood, to such an extent that it can no longer be said to be of the Eskimo race.” End quote.

Almost fifty years ago, in this same building, the first Greenlandic Inuit members of the Danish Parliament, who were elected immediately after the inclusion of Greenland in the Danish realm, made statements to same Committee that they were Danish citizens with the same rights as all other Danes. One of these two Inuit representatives was my Grandfather, Frederik Lyngé. They did so without the knowledge of the legal and political implications, which had the effect of casting a shadow over our status and rights as distinct peoples.

My first point is to ensure that the facts, history and more importantly the record must be corrected. The Inuit of Greenland are indigenous peoples and like all peoples, we, too, have the right to self-determination.

The second point that I would like to make is that we, as the indigenous peoples of Greenland, can now speak for ourselves as direct participants in the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues with the United Nations.

Furthermore, though it may appear that we have gone through the process of decolonisation by virtue of the development of the Greenland Home Rule Government, we have still not completely achieved this objective. In this regard, the Home Rule Government has created a Commission on Self-Government, which has examined these issues and will deliver their final report and recommendations in 2003.

Finally, this matter has compounded the issues related to the Thule case that I raised at the February session of the Commission Working Group on the draft Declaration under the discussion of Article 10.

In 1953, the same year of the Danish government communication to the Committee on Information from Non-Self Governing Territories, the Inughuit of the Thule District of North Greenland were forcibly removed from their traditional homelands in order for the Thule Air Force Base to be constructed by the United States government.

The Inughuit are presently requesting that the Danish Supreme Court direct the Danish government to return the ancestral lands of the Inughuit to the rightful owners and to reconsider the inadequate compensation. In addition, due to the insulting response of the courts and the government, the Inughuit have pursued communications within the International Labour Organization, the Human Rights Committee, and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The case of the Inughuit forced removal and relocation of the Inughuit is a current, real life example of the need for the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Every article of the Declaration is critical to the Inughuit, to all Inuit of Greenland, and indeed, all indigenous peoples of the world.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, it is our hope that through our interventions here at the United Nations we can correct the history of the denial of our rights as I have done today. It is unfortunate that we must leave our communities and travel far away to be heard. However, we have reached a point in history where we can meet through the Permanent Forum, share our concerns and to provide an accurate portrayal of the history of indigenous peoples, relations with governments and others. Though we have outstanding issues to resolve with the government of Denmark, we want to sincerely acknowledge and thank them for the leadership they have shown within the United Nations to establish the permanent forum and to seek new ways to advance our rights and status.

Qujanaq.