

UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
9th Session
Tuesday, 20 April 2010

Agenda Item 3 – Special Theme for the Year:
Indigenous Peoples: development with culture and identity: articles 3 and 32 of the
UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

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Thank-you, Mr. Chair.

When you, Mr. Chair, and the other members of the Permanent Forum met in Bolivia a few months ago to plan this current session, you chose for us in the Arctic a very timely and important special theme. I thank you and I congratulate you.

Inuit across the Arctic, in each of the four countries in which we live, are facing dramatic changes. From Greenland to Canada to Alaska to Russia, Inuit have ships never seen before coming through our sea ice and past our coastal communities. We have mining companies seeing new opportunities as they open mines. We have oil exploration companies drilling offshore. We have hydro-electric dams being designed and large aluminum smelters being planned.

And the scale and speed with which these projects are being conceived are things we need to consider carefully through appropriate impact assessment studies.

I will not repeat the two (2) articles of the Declaration that we are focusing on today, Mr. Chair. But I do want to highlight the fact that as we indigenous peoples exercise our right to self-determination as set out in Article 3, we must be vigilant that the new self-government arrangements that we are increasingly negotiating with our former colonizers also pay heed to our rights as set out in Article 32.

Mr. Chair, on 21 June of last year, Greenland celebrated an historic milestone, and entered into a new era with the inauguration of Self-government. With this new arrangement, came the opportunity to take home 33 legislative areas that were previously under Danish jurisdiction. Less than a year later, Greenland has taken over assumed full responsibility of our subsurface resources. This move is to be celebrated, but it also brings with it an important reality, that of how we can best implement the provisions of Article 32, which among other things calls for fairness, appropriate consultation, informed consent, and so on, has proven to be a difficult article to fully embrace.

Across the Arctic, there are many large projects in the planning stage. We must find ways in which our fragile Arctic environment is not hurt, as our cultural values are carried out through hunting and fishing and other activities that depend on a healthy environment

and the well-being of our people. We must find ways, Mr. Chair, to slow down and do things wisely.

As industrial development is rapidly reaching our areas our way of life will be affected and we will have to adapt to these changes. As you can see, Mr. Chair, the challenge lies in making these decisions in a manner that is well funded inclusive so that we don't lose important parts of our culture and identity. And not to dance to the schedules and wishes of the resource extraction companies, but to that which respects and preserves our own culture and identity.

This is our dilemma, Mr. Chair, and I share it here with all indigenous peoples of the world. As we move forward to achieving article 3 of the Declaration, that of exercising self-determination, let us remember to be equally vigilant on fully exercising the provisions of article 32.

As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed so clearly yesterday here, we need to protect our values of solidarity and reciprocity as they are fundamental to harmonious development.

RECOMMENDATION:

In the light of intervention, Mr. Chair, I would like to recommend that the UN Permanent Forum recommends to the ECOSOC president to allocate funding for a global indigenous summit on this very issue. A global summit on “Promoting Indigenous Culture and Identity through Self-Determination”. I believe that through such a summit, we could all learn invaluable lessons from each other.

May I take this time, Mr. Chair, to invite all here to an ICC-hosted side event on these same issues. It will be held at 1:15 pm tomorrow in building DC2, 13th floor. Information is available on a flyer that has been handed out. You will find this building on the other side of 1st Avenue.

Thank-you