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# International Organization of Indigenous Resource Development

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**WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**  
United Nations - Geneva  
21-25 July, 2003

AGENDA ITEM 4(a) Review of Developments: General Debate

Thank you Mr. Chairman, my name is Marlene Buffalo. This is a joint statement on behalf of the Samson, Ermineskin, Louis Bull and Montana Tribes, Maskwachisak, of the Cree Nation and the International Organization of Indigenous Resource Development, an E.C.O.S.O.C. N.G.O.

We take the floor under the agenda item on review of developments pertaining to the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms of our Indigenous Children and Youth. In summary, let me state the following elements, in particular, to our children's and youth right to self-determination.

**PREFACE**

... in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world...

**Convention of the Rights of the Child, preamble**

Indigenous Peoples and our children and youth are all distinct members of the human family. We have the right to fully enjoy our inalienable human rights on an equal footing and with the same emphasis as non-Indigenous Peoples and individuals. We have the right to be different and be recognized as such. Our diverse cultures are an integral part of the common heritage of humankind. In a spirit of tolerance, fairness and mutual respect, we have the right to freely exercise our human rights and safeguard our natural environment. And we choose to do so, in a manner that celebrates our own Indigenous identity, values and world views.

Yet throughout history, states in the various regions of the globe have sought in every way imaginable to deprive us of our territories, lands, sacred places, resources, languages, cultures and means of subsistence. Genocide, cultural genocide, dispossession, discrimination, marginalization and exclusion have left a legacy of severe impoverishment and a host of debilitating social, economic and cultural challenges.

It is crucial to appreciate that the persistent undermining and denial of Indigenous Peoples' human rights, including the right to self-determination, is a major root cause and contributing factor to the acute health and socio-economic problems in many Indigenous communities and nations. If not reversed, this negative dynamic will continue to severely undermine the integrity of our families, communities and nations. This is wholly unacceptable. Of particular concern are the generations of Indigenous children who continue to be adversely impacted.

Our children and youth have a right to equal opportunity. To pursue their own dreams. To create. To succeed. To play. To embrace any challenge they choose and have reasonable access to the means to do so. In this overall context, self-determined Indigenous children and youth is an unwavering and crucial objective. It is also a human rights entitlement.

In the United Nations Millennium Declaration, virtually all states have affirmed their commitment to "spare no effort to make the United Nations a more effective instrument for pursuing ... the fight for development for all the peoples of the world, the fight against poverty, ignorance and disease; the fight against injustice." However, in regard to Indigenous Peoples, these explicit commitments by states are already being broken.

In the current U.N. Working Group that is considering a draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, some states, such as the United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, are seeking to create a discriminatory double standard in relation to Indigenous Peoples' right of self-determination. These states are violating their solemn obligation to fully respect the Purposes and Principles of the U.N. Charter. This is especially evident, in regard to their duty to promote respect for human rights, based on the "principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples."

Respect for human rights and for the principles of the U.N. Charter is also a key educational goal for children. In the Convention on the Rights of the Child [Art.29(1)(c)], the "Aims of Education" are described in part as follows:

States parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to ... (c) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

So why are some states reneging on these most basic responsibilities? Why are they placing in jeopardy the integrity of the international human rights system? What message do such state actions give to Indigenous Children and others around the globe?

For Indigenous Peoples, the failure of certain prominent states to fulfill essential duties under the U.N. Charter and respect vital international norms is one of the largest impediments we face in attaining much-needed human rights standards in a U.N. Declaration. In December 2002, 22 Indigenous Nations and organizations from 5 different continents highlighted their vigorous objections in a Joint Statement to the U.N. Working Group. In the hopes of raising the conscience of the international community and attracting its strong support, we include this Statement in its entirety in the following pages.

At stake are the inherent dignity and human rights of over 300 million Indigenous People worldwide, of which 180 million are children and youth. The human right of self-determination is a core element of any human rights instrument concerning Indigenous Peoples. It is a prerequisite to the effective enjoyment of all our other human rights. We will continue to strive for its full affirmation, based on principles of justice, equality and non-discrimination. As a minimum standard for our survival and well-being, we will continue to insist on a principled international legal framework - one that encourages and sustains self-determined Indigenous Children and Youth for both present and future generations.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, due to the time constraints, we submit our full text for your consideration and for the Secretariat. Thank you.

Ms. Marlene Buffalo  
Ms. Rose Saddleback  
Mr. Wilton Littlechild