

**First Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
United Nations  
New York City May 13 – 24, 2002**

**Statement by Aqqaluk Lynge  
President  
Inuit Circumpolar Conference  
May 16, 2002**



Item 5: General debate.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

As it is my first intervention please allow me to congratulate you in your election as the first Chairperson of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. I am especially proud of the fact that you are a fellow indigenous person from the Arctic, jointly nominated to the Permanent Forum by the Sami Council and my organization, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, which represents over 150,000 Inuit from Greenland, Canada, Alaska and Chukotka region of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Chairman.

It has been a long and exciting path since the inclusion of the establishment of a Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples in the Program of Action of the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna back in 1993. We know that many consultations have taken place around the world, resulting in the creation of the Permanent Forum. We regard the Permanent Forum as the first step in a long-term effort to ensure that the United Nations will be able to comprehensively and carefully focus upon all of the issues affecting all indigenous peoples. In particular, those relating to our fundamental political, economic, social, cultural, and spiritual rights, as well as peace and security within our communities and homelands and environment and development.

Now that the Permanent Forum is a reality and the historic achievement we have made in partnership with the Governments, will show the international community, that we as Indigenous Peoples can and will contribute through our knowledge and experience in order to ensure that the Forum will be a success. I agree with the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, who said in her opening statement *"there is a natural tendency to focus on what the UN system can do for Indigenous Peoples. But I think it is important that we give at least equal weight to what Indigenous Peoples can do for the United Nations"*.

We are inside the United Nations system Mr. Chairman, and I will assure you that The Inuit Circumpolar Conference will do its best to assist you and your colleagues in your future efforts to achieve the priorities that you will set for the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Mr. Chairman.

Unfortunately, you and your colleagues are beginning under difficult circumstances. Just look at the budget of the Forum, you have only set a side funding for two sessions of the Forum and no funding to establish a separate Secretariat to assist you in your forthcoming work. The success of the Forum can only be a reality with establishment of a permanent secretariat staffed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons. Given these conditions, I respectfully request to you Mr. Chairman that the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues recommend to ECOSOC the establishment of a permanent and separate secretariat, sufficiently funded by the United Nations as soon as possible.

Mr. Chairman.

One of the most important issues that we are dealing with is the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which is now being considered by the Working Group on the Draft Declaration established by the Commission on Human Rights. The 8<sup>th</sup> session of the Working Group will take place in Geneva next December. The session will be very important, because the articles concerning the paramount right to self-determination and our distinct rights to lands, territories and resources will be considered. The ICC supports and has defended the Draft Declaration as it stands. However, we are willing to take into consideration any proposals that strengthen and improve the text and are consistent with the principles of equality, non-discrimination and the absolute prohibition of racial discrimination. In this regard, we are concerned about state proposals that would undermine the text of Article 3 of the Draft Declaration and furthermore, are discriminatory in nature. Such positions should not be allowed within the United Nations, which represents the pinnacle of human rights and whose purpose is to promote and protect the human rights of all peoples, including indigenous peoples.

We are approaching twenty years since the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples held its first meeting. We believe that the world community does embrace the ideal of a strong and useful Declaration. In this regard, I want to use this opportunity to request to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to recommend to ECOSOC a call for an adoption of the Draft Declaration on the Rights on Indigenous Peoples before the end of the International Decade of Indigenous Peoples in 2004, provided that the Declaration is responsive to the aspirations of indigenous peoples and does in

Mr. Chairman.

As I mentioned, the Decade will end in 2004. This Decade proposed a workable and realistic Program of Action, but many of its objectives and goals will not be achieved. As the Decade is coming to its end, there is an increased urgency to address its goals and objectives. Therefore we call upon the Permanent Forum to recommend to ECOSOC to end this Decade with a World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. Such a World Conference could provide the UN system, states and Indigenous peoples with the opportunity to establish a template for future efforts to address and resolve many of the critical issues of concern to Indigenous Peoples. Based on the results of this conference, another Decade should be called for, which would allow for more time to achieve our goals.

In conclusion I want to congratulate you again for your election as Chairman of this important body. We wish you and all of the members of the Forum a successful and productive first term.

Qujanaq!