

Pacific Regional Caucus Statement on the Adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The Indigenous Peoples of the Pacific region were appraised of the text of the modified United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in early September 2007. They communicated their overwhelming support for its passage from 11 different countries spanning the vast reaches of Oceania, which is the largest geographical region of the world and the home of many diverse cultures who are Polynesian, Melanesian and Micronesian. Pacific leaders and Indigenous Peoples have been consistent and unwavering in their support for the human rights for the world's Indigenous Peoples since the inception of this effort 21 years ago in Geneva. We recognize and thank the Government of Fiji – the first State in the world to adopt the Sub-Commission draft of the Declaration – for their efforts to bring agreement among all States and for their leadership in this monumental task.

With the passage of the Declaration we herald the dawning of a new era for relations between Pacific Indigenous Peoples and States, as well as UN agencies and specialized bodies. An era which we believe can now be established on a strong human rights foundation. The passage of the Declaration affirms the fundamental principle that human rights are universal and that the Indigenous Peoples and cultures of the Pacific are entitled to the rights and fundamental freedoms which have for so long been withheld.

For many Indigenous Peoples in the Pacific, where strife and warfare continue, the Declaration will provide a framework for the peaceful resolution of conflict. For those Indigenous Peoples who continue to labor under the yolk of colonization, the Declaration provides a template for renewed efforts to implement the UN decolonization process for restoring to the Indigenous Peoples of the non-self-governing territories a full measure of their right to self-governance and independence.

Pacific peoples view the Declaration not only as a statement of aspiration, but also as a tool for the uplifting and advancement of our families, communities and cultures. The provisions of the Declaration make clear the right of Pacific Indigenous Peoples to economic, social and cultural development. We believe that these provisions, when implemented, can be utilized to address extreme poverty in our regions and expanding problems relating to economic and natural resource exploitation which have become significant issues in Oceania, for small island developing States and the Indigenous Peoples who are the first peoples of the Pacific. In addressing these difficult challenges, the rights set forth in the Declaration to lands, territories and resources and to education, housing and health can guide our peoples and States to workable solutions with the meaningful inclusion of the Pacific native people in the political decision making process of States.

The Declaration provides us all with a way forward. By confirming our right to restitution and compensation for past wrongs and by affirming our right to give our free prior and informed consent to decisions and actions that affect our lives, the Declaration establishes the basis for the resolution of historical inequities and injustices so that our children will not inherit the legacy of colonization. The protections and freedoms elucidated in the Declaration protect our sacred places, affirm our ways of life and provide for our cultural survival.

It is of great concern to us that the United States, New Zealand and Australia continue to play an obstructionist role by refusing to acknowledge human rights for Pacific Indigenous Peoples. We are prepared to address these powers in the Pacific and challenge these States to live up to the obligations they assume under the Charter of the United Nations and the Human Rights Conventions to which they are signatories. The time has come for the United States, New Zealand and Australia to abandon their racist policies towards Indigenous Peoples in the Pacific and globally, and to acknowledge the human rights of all peoples, including the Indigenous Peoples of the Pacific.