

WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS. FOURTH SESSION,  
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Madame Chair,

First of all I would like to congratulate you upon your reelection as chairperson of the Working Group. I feel confident that under your able and firm leadership the Group will make progress in discharging the difficult and complex tasks before it.

Madame Chair,

Central issues in the field of human rights of indigenous populations are matters such as land rights, education, religion, right of association, and the question of autonomy in the field of culture, language and traditional ways of life. In all these fields a guiding principle should be that the indigenous peoples should have influence in the decision making process concerning their own affairs. These questions will be given special focus at this session of the Working Group, and very rightly so. To a certain extent, basic rights in these areas are guaranteed under article 27 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which protects the right of minorities to enjoy their own culture. This provision should be respected and implemented by all governments on whose territory indigenous peoples exist. Experience has shown, however, that the special problems facing indigenous populations cannot be adequately solved by existing international norms of human rights. There is a clear need for a new set of norms in this area. My government therefore supports the view that the Working Group should now embark upon the formulation of concrete proposals regarding the development of standards on the rights of indigenous populations. We agree that the first

WGIP 85 GOV/EUR-NOR/7

task should be to elaborate a declaration of principles on indigenous rights, possibly followed by a convention at a later stage. In this connection the Working Group should also take due account of the ongoing work in relation to the revision of ILO convention 107. And vice versa, the ILO should in its work in this field pay attention to, and follow very closely the developments in the Working Group. In this regard I listened with interest to the statement made yesterday by the representative of the ILO.

Madame Chair,

During the last decade we have witnessed an increasing will and ability of indigenous groups to coordinate their views and formulate common policies. My government welcomes this development, and holds the view that the establishment of contacts between indigenous peoples is important and should be encouraged. In an effort to facilitate this task, the Norwegian government contributes financially to various indigenous organizations, notably the World Council of Indigenous Peoples and the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs. In close cooperation with the organizations of the indigenous people in Norway and the other Nordic countries, the Sami people, my government has over the last few years also given substantial and increasing financial support to various development projects for the benefit of indigenous peoples, especially in Central and South America. Only this year, such grants will amount to more than 15 million Norwegian crowns, or nearly 2 million US dollars. In the implementation of such projects we have also been cooperating with the WCIP, CISA, CORPI, IWGIA and other NGO's as well as directly with local indigenous organizations and groups. The projects which have been supported are among others, in the fields of education, agriculture, health and small scale production.

Furthermore, financial support has been given to the building and strengthening of indigenous organizations. In our view the last-mentioned type of support constitutes a very important supplement to the more traditional project support.

Madame Chair,

My government has followed the work of this Group with keen interest, and has as an observer taken active part in its deliberations together with representatives of other governments and observers from organizations of indigenous populations and other NGO's, as well as various specialized agencies. Also in the future we hope that such observers will be allowed and, indeed, encouraged to take an active part in the Group's work. In this regard it is of great importance to secure the broadest possible participation of representative observers from indigenous populations. My government has therefore given its active support to the proposed establishment of a voluntary fund to assist representatives of indigenous peoples to participate more fully in the deliberations of the Working Group, and sincerely hopes that the draft resolution on this matter now before the General Assembly will be adopted unanimously, as was the case in ECOSOC, the Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission. If this happens, the fund could be established at the beginning of next year, so that representatives of indigenous peoples could benefit from it in connection with the next session of the Working Group.

Finally, Madame Chair, let me mention a point of crucial importance for the future work of this Group, namely the question of secretariat support. My delegation will urge the Secretariat to give high priority in the coming years to assisting the Working Group in discharging its tasks.