



# international service for human rights

service international pour les droits de l'homme  
servicio internacional para los derechos humanos

Adrian Zolner

14

doCip  
ARCHIVES

WGI 90/011/B

United Nations Working Group  
on Indigenous Peoples  
8th Session July - August 1990  
Item 7 of the Agenda

## Intervention of the Director of the International Service for Human Rights

Madame President,

I am very grateful to you for giving me the floor at the end of this session of the working group on Indigenous People. I would like to briefly present some commentaries and suggestions concerning the technical support that is given to a number of representatives of indigenous people during these meetings.

I am the person in charge of the International Service for Human Rights, a non-governmental organization that was created in 1984 with the objective of assisting those that have come to testify in front of the United Nations organs. Each year several hundred witnesses, victims and defenders arrive in Geneva and most of them are not provided for: they are not familiar with the procedures of the United Nations, they do not have a secretariat for keeping in contact with their organization, and they are not provided with adequate financial means necessary to cover the expenses of their stay. Often they do not know very much about what the U.N. organs in fact do. Thus, they do not have concrete means to express themselves, even though most of them have placed their last hopes in the United Nations to finally find a solution to their tragic situations.

For these reasons, five years ago, we set up a "technical secretariat" for all visitors to use during the important sessions of the United Nations, especially the working group on indigenous people. Since 1988, the Secretariat of the UN has allowed us to install this technical secretariat in the Palace of the UN for the use of indigenous peoples. It has been set up by the International Service for Human Rights and DOCIF, an organization created in Geneva by people in solidarity with the struggles of indigenous people.

During these 2 weeks of the session, more than twenty volunteers of DOCIF and the International Service for Human Rights have translated hundreds of speeches and declarations and have typed many manuscripts. The "technical secretariat" has also been able to find a number of free accommodations for indigenous people and arrange their travels, and we had dozens of working sessions with the participants and explained to them how to gain access to the United Nations. The volunteers receive no pay, not even for their travel expenses.

Our volunteers are happy to contribute to a cause in which they strongly believe in. We would like to improve, even more, our services for next year. Allow me to present the following suggestions:

(1) The UN should better assume their technical responsibilities. If a two week meeting is scheduled, translation services should be available for those two weeks. Furthermore, if the UN decides to invite hundreds of indigenous people to participate in the working group, the United Nations should accept the financial consequences of this invitation. Our "technical secretariat" makes it possible for the secretariat of the UN to assign a minimum number of staff members for the secretariat of the working group, but the documentation and information services (press releases) of the UN should be more active. Also, each year many participants face dozens of problems regarding visas, travel documents, etc. We propose that the working group should ask the Secretariat of the UN to organize a meeting with DOCIP and the International Service and other NGOs concerned to discuss measures to be taken. Such a meeting should take place next March or April.

(2) We would like to receive more active support from the UN Secretariat in setting up our "technical secretariat". This year again, the material at our disposal did not enable us to work most efficiently and properly. Therefore, next year we would like to obtain from the UN Secretariat:

- at least two working rooms
- 5 computers (word processors) with at least 2 printers
- an adequate amount of general office supplies, staplers, folders, etc.
- dictionaries, english-french-spanish

We will not be able to continue to work with such material that could be placed in a museum. Also, it is apparent to us that it is important that your working group considers including these proposals in the final report.

(3) We think that the member states that support the working group on Indigenous Peoples should be consistent with their policies. We welcome the fact that many states contribute to the voluntary fund that covers the travel expenses of some participants. But, we think that these states should also contribute to covering the living expenses and the technical assistance of the participants in the working group.

(4) In my last technical remark I would express that it appears to us indispensable to strengthen the capacity of intervention of those participants who are really in need and who constitute the majority of those present. This is an absolute condition to promote balanced exchanges between people of different values. These indispensable exchanges are necessary in order to obtain a consensus on the norms which will guarantee a greater respect of the rights of indigenous people all over the world.