

**STATEMENT OF REGIONAL ACTION GROUP FOR THE ENVIRONMENT PRESIDENT
MELISSA JACOBS TO THE FIRST PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES**

doCip
ARCHIVES

I wish to express our groups congratulations to the chair and members of the first permanent forum on Indigenous issues, and to tell you that our prayers and heartfelt thanks go out to you and your families for your willingness to give your time and knowledge toward the enormous tasks that lie ahead of us. I wish to acknowledge our ancestors whose suffering, violation and tenacity paved the way for our arrival here at the United Nations.

Our group works on a broad range of issues affecting indigenous peoples, including the protection of burial grounds and the preservation of irreplaceable agricultural land from pollution and development. We are traditional seed savers also, and this is the area of work for the forum that we wish to address.

I work daily on the precious soil of our mother Earth. I feel the burning lack of ozone protection upon my skin. I struggle with the effects of climate change daily as we face flooding, drought, extremes of heat and cold, where once there was an even reliable growing season in the protective buffer of the Great Lakes. Our farm lands have been affected by unwanted pesticide spraying, manure lagoon runoff, aquifer depletion and contamination due to over-mining of salt by irresponsible, multi-national corporations. Around the world indigenous farmers as myself face these issues and worse. But the most serious, life threatening issue we all face is one that is being forced on us by the United States and other powerful, industrialized farming Nations.

That issue is the suicidal, genocidal policy of genetic engineering of our plants, seeds and creatures. The insertion of genes from one life form into that of another, and the deadly patenting of the "terminator technology", that renders the fruitful life of our foods into aborted, dead food, is a violation of the Creation and an abomination on the face of the Earth. We must speak with one voice in defense of our brothers and sisters of the plant and creature world, who have no voice here at this forum. Our lives and those of the future ancestors are totally dependent on these innocent life forms.

Man cannot continue to experiment with the Creators perfect gift, with out dire consequences. Once the wind has carried this contaminated pollen to the four directions there will be no way to undo the damage. Our traditional seed banks will be lost forever. Many of them are already contaminated. Our indigenous farmers were the first growers and seed savers. It was our knowledge and foods which fed all the colonists who arrived in our lands, unwanted and uninvited. We are the keepers of life.

According to Article 8 of the Convention on Biological Diversity, contracting parties agree to respect, preserve, and maintain our traditional knowledge and practices relevant to conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. I call on the Permanent Forum with possible funding from the Global Environment Facility, to study the feasibility of establishing an IFAO, Indigenous Food and Agricultural Organization, whose mandate would include:

- 1) The preservation and documentation of all our indigenous seeds and plants with the express intention of preventing the further theft and patenting of our traditional seeds and plants.
- 2) That the forum create regional conferences around the world where indigenous seedsavers and farmers can educate destructive, industrialized farmers, and also those who wish to take up the work of growing their neighbors foods in the methods that have sustained the world's people for millenia.
- 3) To this task I would like to volunteer my knowledge and services to the Permanent Forum and encourage other Indigenous farmers to join me.

We as indigenous farmers are often characterized as primitive, backwards, unskilled growers. To the contrary, we are the ~~only~~ farmers who know how to sustain our lives, AND the lives of our sisters and brothers of the plant and seed families, with respect for and protection of our Mother Earth.

It is time that the world acknowledges our contribution to the advancement of all civilizations and works to protect our foods and ourselves from extinction.

THANKYOU