

WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POULATIONS

FIFTH SESSION, 3-7 August 1987



[Mr. K. Nyumekye]

Opening statement

It is a privilege and a pleasure for me to open this fifth session of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations. All of you are most welcome to the Palais des Nations. Your sessions, and the topics being discussed, have increasingly caught the attention of the human rights community and it is my sincere hope and desire that this session will continue the useful and constructive work already undertaken at previous Group sessions.

The mandate of the Working Group is very clear and my remarks therefore can be brief. In accordance with ECOSOC resolution 1982/34, you have before you two main tasks: first, the review of developments pertaining to the protection and promotion of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous populations and, second, the evolution of international standards concerning indigenous rights.

With regard to the standard-setting item on your agenda, I would like to make a few remarks. You will recall that the Working Group at its fourth session in 1985 decided to go ahead with the drafting of a declaration on indigenous rights for eventual adoption by the General Assembly. In this context and pursuant to Sub-Commission resolution 1985/22, the Secretariat has

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prepared an Analytical compilation of existing legal instruments and proposed draft standards relating to indigenous rights, submitted to you with document E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.4/1987/2, and it is our hope that this document will further facilitate your preparation of the draft standards. Similarly, I welcome another compilation, prepared by the Government of Canada, which contains provisions from several international human rights instruments relating to but not directly dealing with indigenous rights; this second compilation is available to you in document E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.4/1987/WP.1/Add.2. In this same context, I would like to draw your attention to General Assembly resolution 41/120 of 4 December 1986, entitled "Setting international standards in the field of human rights", which establishes a series of guidelines with regard to the drafting of new standards; copies of the resolution will be made available to you in the Conference Room.

Before the Working Group, in document E/CN.4/Sub.2/1987/1, you have the provisional agenda of this session which should be read in conjunction with the "Plan of Action from 1986 Onwards" adopted by the Group in 1985 (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1985/22, annex I). In accordance with this Plan, the Group may wish, at its present session, to draw particular attention to questions relating to the right to autonomy, self-government and self-determination, including political representation and institutions; the right and responsibility of indigenous populations, as of all others, to respect universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms; and the right to health, medical care, other social services, and adequate housing. As you see from this listing, which is by no means an exhaustive listing of the issues under consideration, you have a difficult and comprehensive task in front of you and I wish you the greatest possible success in what I am sure will be a week full of hard work and fruitful deliberations.

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By way of conclusion, I would like, for your information, to say a few words about the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations. This spring, the Secretary-General appointed the five members of the Board of Trustees. The Board members appointed are Mr. Dunfjeld from Norway, Ambassador Sene from Senegal, Mr. Taurao from New Zealand, Mr. Türk from Yugoslavia, and Mr. Willemsen-Diaz from Guatemala. The Secretariat has undertaken all efforts to convene the first meeting of the Board in the month of August. However, because of non-availability of some Board members in the time scheduled for the meeting, and taking into account the request by donor countries to keep the administrative costs defrayed from the funds as low as possible, the Secretariat now intends to convene the Board after further consultations with the members at a later stage for the purpose of discussing the programme of work, including selection criteria and the selection of applicants, if applications have been received by the fund. It is our expectation that the Board will enable some representatives of indigenous populations and communities to attend the sixth meeting of the Working Group in 1988, by providing them with travel funds. The Fund is as of today in possession of contributions made by the Governments of Australia, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden and I should use this opportunity to extend my gratitude to these donor countries and, at the same time, to extend a request to all Governments and non-governmental organizations for additional contributions so that the Fund will be in a position to fulfil its mandate when it starts its operations next year.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to repeat my welcoming words to all of you and my wishes for a successful session.

Thank you.