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Commission on Human Rights
Sub-Commission on Prevention of
Discrimination and Protection
Minorities
Working Group on Indigenous Peoples
Sixteenth Session
27 -31 July 1998

WGIP 98/NAM, CAN/32

Agenda item 10 - Permanent Forum

Oral statement by Sharon Venne - Joseph Bighead Cree, Valley River First Nation, Akaitcho Territory Government, Deh Cho First Nations and Hupacasath First Nation

Madam Daes and the members of the Working Group, we would like to make four brief points on the Permanent Forum. There are serious questions that need to be answered before we can agree to the establishment of a permanent forum.

1. How is this process going to be funded? We note with some alarm the lack of funding to support the present programme within the Office of High Commissioner. We have noted that there have been no funds set aside for work on the Decade. There were no funds available for the Treaty Study. There were no funds set aside for the International Year for Indigenous Peoples and there were no funds set aside to have a permanent office within the UN related to the issues concerning Indigenous Peoples. If various governments had not provided monies to have Indigenous Peoples working within the UN, there would be none. So, Madam Chair - this is a very serious concern to us. For all the good will in the world will not get the process moving without the necessary funds.

2. The representation of Indigenous Peoples in the permanent forum. We would not like to see the same process which is presently in place in the inter-sessional repeated in the permanent forum. As Indigenous Peoples, we have been struggling to be recognized as nations in our own right not as an NGO with limited status within the system.

3. We have no concrete plan of action of the work that will be undertaken by the Forum. For example, yesterday we heard from the report of Special Rapporteur on Treaties. Can we place the issue related to disputes between Indigenous Peoples and state government within the Permanent Forum for adjudication. It seems to me that could be an appropriate place if we can determine the first two questions.

4. The other issue which concerns us relates to the role of state governments in this process. It seems to me that this concept developed at the meeting in Vienna - promoted by a certain state official. His goal and objective was to end the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples when the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was complete. We all know that the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples is a permanent forum. It is mandated by the General Assembly to collect information from Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Peoples come to this forum in their own right. They do not need the permission of an NGO or a state government. They need to have permission of their own Indigenous organization or Indigenous government. We can speak freely in this forum to the human rights experts about the situations within our territories. We can be involved in standard setting in partnership with the Working Group. In a permanent forum, who will control us? We are always mindful of the way the colonizers operate. They create situations and then play with Indigenous Peoples like puppets. We are not so inclined to go along with the game until we see the complete set of rules and the game board. At this time, we have a concept. We need to see more from those states

Thank you.
31 July 1998

proposing the
Permanent forum

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