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Intervention  
Second Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous  
People  
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Word Blind Union

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Nil Wendall Nicholas Lewes  
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My name is Wendall Nicholas, I am a member of the Maliseet Nation at Ne-Goot-Gook. I am here today to address this forum once again to offer my perspective as an indigenous person with a sight disability on the issues that confront our people.

The World Blind Union represents 180 Million blind and partially sighted persons from 600 organizations in 158 countries. Our aims are to

1. Fight for the human rights of blind, partially sighted and deaf/blind people throughout the world;
2. Prevent discrimination against blind and partially sighted people;
3. Advance the well-being and further the rights of blind and partially sighted people, particularly in developing countries;
4. To promote the prevention and treatment of blindness.

The Indigenous Committee of the WBU was established to focus on the realities and challenges encountered by Indigenous blind and partially sighted people. As a member of the Indigenous Committee of the World Blind Union, I wish to bring to the attention of this forum the severe hardships encountered by indigenous children and youth.

Earlier this month, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), released details concerning the relationship between child poverty and violence in Latin America and the Caribbean. Children between 3 and 5 years are the ones that suffer the most corporal punishment, and it is calculated that 85

percent of deaths by abuse are classified as accidental or indeterminate. For each death it is estimated that nine children are disabled, 71 suffer serious injuries and countless suffer psychological damage.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 750,000 children die worldwide from preventable injuries and millions suffer severe wounds. Many of these injuries generate permanent disabilities and cerebral damage.

WHO also reports that 60% of the world's blind lives in sub-Saharan Africa, China and India. In 2000, WHO initiated a strategy known as the Vision 2020, the Right to Sight. Within the framework of the strategy, five conditions have been identified as immediate priorities: cataract, trachoma, onchocerciasis (river blindness) childhood blindness and refractive errors/low vision. A goal set by the UN's World Summit on Children in 1990 was to eliminate blindness resulting from vitamin A deficiency by the year 2000. This has been achieved in most countries, however, there are still 78 countries where vitamin A deficiency remains a public health problem.

These numbers denote poverty, isolation, and abandonment. These realities describe the conditions that indigenous children and youth face. Indeed there is much hard work that is being done, my brothers and sisters – we can and must do more:

The WBU calls on the Economic and Social Council, Pan American Health Organization and the World Health Organization to convene a meeting to develop strategies that address the particular circumstances encountered by indigenous children and youth related to injury control, treatment and the prevention of blindness.

The WBU calls on member states of the United Nations to participate and financially support the efforts to convene this meeting.

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