



COMMISSION OF THE CHURCHES ON INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
of The World Council of Churches



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UN PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES 13-24 MAY 2002

Item 5: General Statements

Mr. Chairperson, distinguished members of the Permanent Forum, indigenous brothers and sisters who have traveled many miles to be here thank you for this opportunity to address this meeting. In particular we congratulate you on your election as Chairperson of this first session of the permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. I am Yuchi from the North American region. I am representing the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches (WCC, an organization with 342 member churches in over hundred countries.

The World Council of Churches has a long history of accompaniment of Indigenous Peoples in the UN processes, including the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations, and the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We would like to specially acknowledge the advocacy work that has been carried out in these for a have led directly to this momentous occasion, the inaugural session of the permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. In the traditions of our elders, we give thanks for the work and the people who have gone before us.

It is also particularly gratifying to see the indigenous members of the permanent Forum and we have congratulate them on their appointments. We offer our support and best wishes for the work ahead of them and affirm our common commitment to the aspirations of Indigenous Peoples through out the world.

Mr. Chairperson, we join in recognizing that the success of the Permanent Forum depends on the commitment of all its partners, the governments, the UN Agencies and indigenous peoples, to ensure that its mandate is fulfilled. Such commitment requires a movement beyond words. It requires a commitment of resources, whereby the work of the permanent Forum is adequately funded. We note the concerns of the Human Rights commissioner in her opening remarks, that funding from existing resources within the regular budgetary systems of the United Nations cannot be the only source of support. In light of this, we encourage the lead agency for the permanent Forum be proactive about exploring sources of funding for the forum, including governments and Un agencies.

We are particularly concerned about this because the mandate of the Permanent Forum dictates that members must be in constant contact with international networks and indigenous communities, preparing disseminating information and raising awareness of indigenous issues within the UN system. In addition, the Permanent Forum will require the establishment of a separate secretariat to provide technical and administrative support. This would be another necessary component of the budget.

Mr. Chairperson, the Permanent Forum also requires a commitment of action, whereby UN agencies work to further the meaningful participation of the Indigenous Peoples in their activities. An requires a Commitment to the Indigenous representatives attending the forum. This means providing ease of access to these meetings and the meaningful participation in the agenda deliberations by the indigenous representatives. We would hope to see the full participation of indigenous representatives, including elders, women, and youth in future meetings of the Permanent Forum.

Mr. Chairperson, the World Council of Churches wishes to call attention to the differences in mandate Between the Permanent Forum and that of the Working Group on Indigenous populations, the latter given attention to the evolution of international standards concerning indigenous peoples rights. We would expect that these differences be taken note of when the Economic and Social Council reviews the Working Group on Indigenous populations. Certainly, we see the necessity of both mechanisms within the United Nations. In particular, we note the work on the Draft United Nations Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and we join with the indigenous international community an calling for the immediate adoption of the draft Declaration. It is imperative that the operational agencies of the UN use the declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples as their frame work in working with the permanent forum and the Indigenous communities. As we near the end of the united Nations Decade on indigenous Peoples we hope that our goal of seeing the adoption of the Draft will become a reality.

Finally Mr. Chairperson, we look forward to the continuing discussions on the review of activities of the UN System , relating to Indigenous Peoples and economic and social development, the environment, education, health and human rights. It is our hope that such discussions will allow indigenous Peoples to share their realities. These realities will expose us to stories of marginalization, of oppression, of systematic disenfranchising from land. Of sustained assault on our languages and erosion of our cultures. However, within these discussions, we also glimpse the unique holistic world view of indigenous communities. It is a worldview where there is no separation between the secular and sacred, the physical and the spiritual. Where we view ourselves as part of a whole, in coexistence with creation and all its inhabitants.

The Permanent Forum offers us an opportunity to move forward. To move beyond words. To take action. This requires a deep commitment and a strength of purpose that is unwavering. We do this in the knowledge that our strength is not the strength of one_ but the strength of many. It is the strength of my brothers and sisters here in this room, it is the strength of our brothers and sisters at home, and it is the strength of those who have gone before us.