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WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

Eighth session, 23 July - 3 August 1990

OPENING STATEMENT

It is a privilege and a pleasure for me to open this eighth session of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, and I wish to warmly welcome all of you to the Palais des Nations at Geneva. The Under-Secretary-General for Human Rights, Mr. Martenson, regrets that he is not in a position to be with you today and has requested me to convey to you his greetings and best wishes, and on behalf of the Centre for Human Rights I wish you continued progress and success in the difficult and responsible work awaiting you.

The mandate of the Working Group is very clear and my remarks therefore can be brief. According to Economic and Social Council 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 of indigenous populations and, second, the evolution of international standards concerning the rights of indigenous peoples.

Foremost amongst your tasks at the moment is undoubtedly the standard-setting part of the Working Group's mandate. 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 resolution 1989/34 the Sub-Commission commended the Chairman/Rapporteur, Mrs. Erica-Irene Daes, for the progress made at its seventh session in carrying out its mandate, and endorsed the programme of work and procedure adopted by the Working Group for the continuation and completion of the drafting of a declaration on indigenous rights, and entrusted the Chairman/Rapporteur with the task of preparing a second revised text of the

WHP 90/UN/WGI/2

declaration to be based on comments made orally at sessions of the Working Group and on written observations and suggestions received from Governments, indigenous peoples, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The document prepared by the Chairman/Rapporteur is now before you in E/CN.4/Sub.2/1990/39. By ECOSOC decision 1990/238 the Council endorsed the recommendations of Commission resolution 1990/62 and authorized the Working Group on Indigenous Populations to meet for 10 working days prior to the forty-second session of the Sub-Commission this year. This was decided in order to ensure the Working Group's resources for the purpose of intensifying its efforts to complete a draft declaration on indigenous rights. It goes without saying that you have before you an important task and I wish you all success in your work.

In addition, you may wish, under the various agenda items, to consider a number of other indigenous issues. This may include ECOSOC decision 1990/248 which recommends that the General Assembly proclaim an International Year for the World's Indigenous People in 1993. By resolution 1989/36 the Sub-Commission entrusted Mr. Asbjorn Eide and Ms Christy Mbonu with the task of preparing a working paper on possible United Nations activities for an international year for indigenous rights with an explicit focus on the development process and on promoting international co-operation with indigenous peoples' organizations. You will have this working paper before you in document E/CN.4/Sub.2/1990/41. By resolution 1989/77, on the basis of recommendations by the Sub-Commission (resolution 1988/20) and Commission (resolution 1989/4) ECOSOC confirmed the appointment of Mr. Miguel Alfonso Martinez as Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission and authorized him to carry out the study of the potential utility of treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements between indigenous populations and Governments for the purpose of ensuring the promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous populations.

However, I will not elaborate on the Working Group's provisional agenda and agenda items. This will be done in the Chairman/Rapporteur's opening statement. Again, I wish you the utmost success in your work and move to item 1 of the provisional agenda, namely, the election of the Chairman/Rapporteur.