

Seventeenth Session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations
Geneva, Switzerland
July 26-30, 1999

Statement by the AINU ASSOCIATION of RERA (Tokyo)
Yuuki Hasegawa
Item 5

Thank you, Madame Daes.

At present, Madame Chairperson, the Japanese government does not recognize the right of the Ainu people to manage our own land, not even the right to administer certain areas, such as sacred sites and those places which hold historical significance for us. These historically significant lands naturally include the sacred places where our ancestors prayed and the lakes and mountains that are the stage for our Ainu legends. They also include chashi, which are the sites that were used as forts during the invasion of the Japanese into our territory, as well as the sites commemorating the forced relocation of Ainu children for assimilationist education.

As an Ainu living in Tokyo, I feel it is important to point out that these historically meaningful sites are not limited to the island of Hokkaido. For example, there is a memorial site in Tokyo, which commemorates the forced relocation of Ainu to a boarding school in the distant capital, where they were subjected to assimilationist education. In 1872, the Colonial Development Agency established in Tokyo the first of its many schools aimed at assimilating the Ainu into the Japanese way of life. Built in the Shiba-Zoji area of Tokyo, this school housed 26 males and 9 females (aged thirteen to thirty-eight) in the first year. There the young Ainu were forced to study the Japanese language, learn Japanese agricultural and animal husbandry practices, and Japanese customs.

Over 1000 kilometers from home, these Ainu were forced to study in an utterly different environment and live according to a foreign lifestyle and customs, while the value of their own culture and language was rejected. As a result, many became ill and several ran away from the boarding school. Only 5 out of the 35 students remained at the end of that first year. It is said that those who stayed in Tokyo were often put on display, and faced many other humiliating and frightening hardships.

We cannot forget the experiences of these young Ainu whom the Japanese government forcibly took to Tokyo. We want to honor them at the Tokyo site in the Ainu way, with a prayer ceremony we call *kamuynomi*. We demand of the Japanese government free access and the right to administer the Tokyo site ourselves. We want to be able to build a *nusa* (an altar) and freely hold monthly *kamuynomi* and *icharpa* (a memorial service).

We also want to establish a cemetery for those Ainu who fled to Tokyo to escape the poverty and discrimination of Hokkaido. We need a place to honor them according to our way, in order to create a spiritual link to future generations of Ainu living in and around Tokyo.

Thank you.

Yuuki Hasegawa
AINU ASSOCIATION of RERA

Tel/Fax 03-3469-9019

E-mail yuuki_asung@hotmail.com

11-1 #2 Ooyamacho Shibuyaku Tokyo, JAPAN 151-00

WGIP 99/EAS. JPN/5