

**Oral Statement by Prof. S. James Anaya,
James J. Lenoir Professor of Human Rights Law and Policy
Indigenous Peoples Law and Policy Program
The University of Arizona**

Madam Chairperson,

Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,

Distinguished Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people,

Distinguished representatives of indigenous peoples,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to take the floor today in my capacity as a member of the Indigenous Peoples Law and Policy Program of the University of Arizona, in order to express my deep respect and admiration for Dr. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, and for his important work as UN Special Rapporteur on indigenous peoples.

I have had the great pleasure of knowing and working with Dr. Stavenhagen for a number of years. I am still grateful to him for accepting the request to participate as an expert witness in the public hearing of the case of *Awas Tingni vs. Nicaragua* at the Inter-American Court on Human Rights, in 2001. His brilliant testimony made a significant contribution to the Court's landmark decision in that case. I am also grateful to him for accepting the invitation of the Indigenous Law and Policy Program to host with us the Expert Seminar on the implementation of national and international norms regarding the rights of indigenous peoples in 2005, which left an unforgettable memory both in our University community and among the Indian nations of Arizona.

For all of us, Dr. Stavenhagen is a true role model of intellectual rigor, generosity, commitment, humility and compassion. All of these qualities, combined with his capacity for listening and for engaging in constructive dialogue, while always showing the same

level of respect for all persons, have turned Dr. Stavenhagen into a historical figure in the protection and promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples. It is surely not an exaggeration to state that Dr. Stavenhagen has earned his place in the history of the human rights movement. And, fortunately for all of us, I'm sure he will still have many to contribute for this cause.

There are many aspects of Dr. Stavenhagen's work that would surely merit mention, from his significant research on a range of topics of importance to indigenous peoples to his path breaking visits to countries in all regions of the world. But I cannot fail to highlight his tireless efforts along with those of many others to promote adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which is also now a part of the legacy of his important work as Special Rapporteur.

As some in this audience know by now, on March 29 2008, the President of the Human Rights Council, following consultations with Council members and regional groups, indigenous organizations, and other stakeholders, appointed me to succeed Dr. Stavenhagen as Special Rapporteur on indigenous peoples. I am deeply honored by this appointment, which I have formally accepted. I acknowledge the trust that not only the members of the Council but also many indigenous peoples and organizations have placed in me for this position.

It is with a great sense of respect, humility, and purpose that I will take over this important responsibility within the next few days. Indigenous peoples across the world continue to endure serious violations of their human rights. They remain the poorest among the poor, their ancestral cultures and identities are assaulted, and they are still deprived of their lands and territories. The responsibility to promote and help protect the rights of indigenous peoples is enormous, but I am confident that strides can continue to be made to overcome the obstacles indigenous peoples face. I believe that with the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other developments we are in a new era, an era that holds out new hope for forward looking dialogue and action to see these rights realized. The legacy Dr. Stavenhagen has left us

both challenges and inspires. I trust that I will be able to count on his guidance and wise judgment in the future.

Many thanks to all for your attention,

Y Muchas gracias, Rodolfo, por su amistad y ejemplo