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Item 6 (b)

Follow-up to the World Conference Against Racism, Xenophobia and related intolerance

Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak here on behalf of the Ainu Association of Hokkaido. I'm a member of the Ainu people from the northern part of Japan.

The Ainu Association of Hokkaido participated in the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa. While we were surprised by the large size of the conference, we also realized that "big events" do not necessarily lead to "big results". Indeed, the fact that the conference was reported throughout Japan certainly helped to draw attention of the average Japanese to the issue of racism [in their own country]. We, the Ainu people, acknowledge the positive effects of the conference.

However, in order that such conferences gain more moral authority, we strongly suggest that they be held more frequently and especially, in a regionalized form. Each region should hold its own conference. It should be a controlled size in order to address specific issues in the region.

For this purpose, the Ainu Association of Hokkaido would like to propose a regional forum with indigenous peoples from Japan and neighboring countries, such as those from Sakhalin and the Kamchatka of Russia. By doing so, we would like to bridge our network and enhance close cooperation in the region.

Mr. Chairman, I also would like to point out the question of legitimacy of NGOs. Let me give you an illustration. The Ainu Research Center, which is a different organization from ours, claimed on the first day of this Working Group that Hokkaido University had stolen our ancestors' bones under the pretext of research.

Actually, our association has had many rounds of negotiations with Hokkaido University since 1982. The result has been fruitful so far. A memorial for our ancestors has been erected with two hundred thousand dollars of funding; every year an ancestral ceremony has been held since 1984 in order to calm our ancestors' spirits; and finally, bones were returned to the original places, where possible.

May I also remind you that we were very grateful to see the former chairman of this Working Group, Ms. Erica-Irene Daes, at the ancestral ceremony in 1991. Several working papers of the Working Group of that year made reference to this event.

The Ainu Resource Center intimated that Hokkaido University did not take any action. The fact is, however, that our constant lobbying induced the University to apologize and take appropriate action.

I just mention ~~this case~~ to illustrate how easy it is for NGOs to claim to represent a certain ethnicity or social group without having real support from indigenous peoples. Therefore, we think, Mr. Chairman, that some criteria of participation are needed in order to prevent a conference from becoming just big and the real message of indigenous peoples being diluted by various contradictory statements.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your understanding and attentiveness.