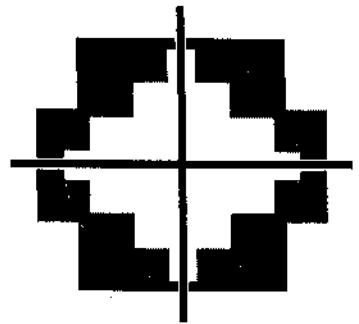


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AMERICAN INDIAN LAW ALLIANCE

NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

Thank you Mr. Chairperson and congratulations on your election. Greetings to our Chiefs, Clanmothers, Elders, Women and Young People. Greetings to our honored leaders of Indigenous Nations. Greetings to the distinguished representatives of the United Nations agencies and the honored representatives of Member States. With respect, I address you all, especially the members of the Permanent Forum who have agreed to assume a great responsibility.

The American Indian Law Alliance is very proud to be part of this historic first meeting of the Permanent Forum. As an organization with offices here in New York City dedicated to serving the leadership of our traditional nations and communities we have been honored to be of service in any way that we can. We welcome you all to our territories.

We would like to thank the spiritual leader of the Haudenosaunee, Tadodaho Sid Hill, for his remarks on the opening day, and we support his recommendations. We agree that Indigenous Nations need to "sit as Nations in the United Nations bodies, especially when the discussions concern our lives and lands." We would also like to repeat the sentiment offered in his speech that "We offer our hand in friendship to you in our commitment to work together." It is in this spirit that we would respectfully make the following recommendations to the members of the Permanent Forum.

We request that the Permanent Forum submit the following recommendations to ECOSOC:

-We would like to add our support to the many voices that have called for the establishment of a separate Secretariat for the Permanent Forum within the United Nations system. We strongly believe that the Permanent Forum, in order to fulfill its mandate effectively, needs its own separate Secretariat, a secretariat which can independently solicit funds for its work. We urge the members of the Permanent Forum, to take the necessary steps for the establishment of the secretariat during the current session, and decide on the location of the secretariat and the procedure by which the staff of the secretariat is appointed by the expert members of the Permanent Forum.

-With regard to the venue of the annual sessions of the Permanent Forum, we would recommend that the Permanent Forum members consider a regional rotation of the sessions between the 7 regions from which the Indigenous members of the Permanent Forum are appointed. We suggest that the members of the Permanent Forum decide from year to year in which region the following session will be held.

-We agree with everyone who has stated that the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples should be looked at as a complementary framework for the Permanent Forum. The Permanent Forum has a mandate to advise ECOSOC on Indigenous issues relating to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights, and the Draft Declaration represents the minimum standard of Indigenous Peoples' rights related to these issues. In particular, the Draft Declaration endorses the right of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination and respect for our treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements with States - rights which are essential for our survival and development. We call for the urgent adoption of the Draft Declaration before the end of the Decade in 2004, so that the Permanent Forum can begin to work within the framework of the Declaration. The Declaration should be followed by an International Convention on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and we urge the Permanent Forum to address this.

-We welcome the new constructive dialogue between the Permanent Forum and UN agencies which we have witnessed over the past days, and we support the strengthening of this dialogue. In order for the members of the Permanent Forum to be able to engage in informed and meaningful dialogue, they urgently need to receive detailed reports from the UN agencies on their programs for Indigenous Peoples, including reports on the budgetary allocations for these programs.

-In order to be able to function efficiently, the Permanent Forum also needs to secure a budget proportionate to the scope of its mandate and we call upon the UN General Assembly to provide sufficient funding for the Permanent Forum from the regular budget of the United Nations. We are concerned that the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly has not allocated a budget for the Permanent Forum beyond 2003. We recognize that the Fifth Committee will not meet to determine the next biennium budget until 2004. Therefore, we request that the Permanent Forum recommend that ECOSOC request a meeting of the Fifth Committee, as early as possible, to decide on the budget for the Permanent Forum to cover the period beyond 2003.

-We would like to support our sister Rigoberta Menchú Tum's proposal to establish an independent fund for the Permanent Forum. In this context, we suggest that the members of the Permanent Forum recommend that ECOSOC make a request to the UN Secretary-General that Rigoberta Menchú Tum and Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper, Haudenosaunee be appointed as Goodwill Ambassadors for the Permanent Forum.

-The American Indian Law Alliance supports the call for a World Summit on Indigenous Peoples at the end of the International Decade on the World's Indigenous Peoples, to review and evaluate the achievements of the Decade. As our brother Chief Matthew Coon Come stated, the establishment of the Permanent Forum is the most significant achievement of the Decade to date. However, much remains to be done. The goals of the Decade are far from being fulfilled, and to make sure that the momentum that is gathering is not lost, a second Decade needs to be launched.

-Noting that the Permanent Forum and the Working Group on Indigenous Populations have their own respective mandates, we urge the members of the Permanent Forum to put an emphasis on establishing strong mutual relationships with the Working Group on Indigenous Populations. Urgent attention needs to be given to the question on how they can best supplement each other and work together effectively. Noting further, that the Working Group has not completed its mandate, we strongly support the continuing existence of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations.

-We endorse the recommendation of the Committee on Indigenous Health, that the Permanent Forum recommend that the newly established Inter-Agency Support Group, under the joint auspices of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNIFEM, convene a meeting with Indigenous women to begin the urgent task of addressing the health of Indigenous women.

Danayto.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.