

**First Meeting of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
13-24 May 2002, United Nations – New York**



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Item 5: General Statements

Thank you Mr. Chairman for giving me this opportunity to address the historic first session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional territory of the original peoples of this land.

Elders, distinguished government delegates and representatives of Indigenous peoples, NGOs and various UN specialized agencies.

Mr. Chairperson,

Policies regarding Indigenous peoples on a state level and an international level that affect Indigenous peoples have been developed without their full and equal participation and consent. Many speakers have previously identified this problem in many areas, including in many UN agencies. Now recognizing this problem, many of the UN agencies are developing "Indigenous" components, but these components are an afterthought to programs that are inherently anti-Indigenous in their conception and design.

An example can be found in the statement by the observer delegation of Canada on Social and Economic Development made at the Permanent Forum: "Rights may come to mean little in the lives of Indigenous peoples unless the means to sustainable social and economic development, including strong governance, are also available. An agenda of sustainable development provides a necessary foundation for the meaningful enjoyment of human rights by Indigenous peoples." The implication is that the rights of Indigenous peoples will be guaranteed only under a Western model of governance and development. And in fact, Canada is currently drafting legislation, the **First Nations Governance Act**, that will reduce the legal status of First Nations to corporate status and will erode their pre-existing legal status. The legislation is mandatory and will be imposed on First Nations. First Nations will have no avenues to appeal or challenge the legislation. The process was initiated without the informed consent and full participation of First Nations, and, to date, First Nations have not seen a draft of the bill. Adding an "Indigenous" component to this corporate- modelled governance act will undermine First Nations' rights to self-determination because our nations are not based on a western corporate model.

All Indigenous peoples of the world face this problem. We do not want to begin with a model that was developed without Indigenous peoples in mind, and then add an "Indigenous" component to it. We need to start from scratch and ask what policies and programs do we need that will help ensure the survival and well-being of Indigenous peoples around the world.

We recommend that the Permanent Forum and UN agencies involve Indigenous peoples as equal and full participants in ALL phases of program development and with Indigenous peoples' full consent. And if Indigenous peoples find these programs to be inherently problematic, then the Permanent Forum and UN agencies should advocate for their complete removal and replacement by programs that promote the self-determination of Indigenous peoples.