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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-Commission on Prevention of
Discrimination and Protection
of Minorities

Working Group on Indigenous Populations
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STANDARD-SETTING ACTIVITIES

EVOLUTION OF STANDARDS CONCERNING THE RIGHTS
OF INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

Material received from Governments

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Norway

NORWAY

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Norway would like to express her satisfaction over the fact that the important efforts to ensure the rights of indigenous populations have made further decisive progress, as the Working Group has now presented a proposal for principles which can provide a basis for concrete discussions. In this connection it is gratifying to witness the broad and active participation of representatives of indigenous populations in the discussions on the substance of the principles. The establishment of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations is viewed as an important contribution to ensuring participation in the further efforts, and Norway has therefore actively supported and contributed to the Fund. In the light of the heavy and lasting pressure which indigenous populations are subject to in large parts of the world, it is absolutely necessary that the Group's work proceed according to plan, in spite of the economic cutbacks in the United Nations system.

In the efforts to protect the rights of indigenous populations, it is Norway's view that it is natural to take as a point of departure the need to preserve cultural identity. At the same time, as the members of these populations become more conscious of their background and heritage, there must be a reduction in the pressure towards cultural assimilation. It must be made clear that the cultures of indigenous populations are an inalienable part of the world's cultural heritage. Safeguarding the living conditions of these populations thus serves not only to protect their human rights, but also contributes to the cultural and social diversity necessary to the further development of mankind.

As evidenced in the above-mentioned viewpoints, the seven proposed principles presented by the Working Group in Annex II of its report from the fourth session (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1985/22) are an expression of the important rights which must be guaranteed for the indigenous populations. It may be noted that the Group's work has been based on consideration of the international instruments which already exist in this field, particularly the International Bill of Human Rights. Against this background it is important that, when formulating principles which express the rights of indigenous peoples, care is taken not to impair the protection which already exists. At the same time, an individual principle must not come into conflict with other fundamental rights as embodied in the International Bill of Human Rights.

Some of the decisions will necessarily seem like collective rights for the group. Protection of the group's existence is necessary in order to safeguard the individual's cultural rights, and is therefore a natural part of a declaration of this kind.

With a view to the right to education, the proposal of the Working Group appears to aim at genuine equality in the treatment of indigenous populations compared with other groups as regards education. This must be viewed as being extremely important when the goal is to give indigenous cultures the opportunity to endure and develop. Since the total resources available will vary considerably from State to State, we must consider whether it would be wise to place conditions on the distribution of these resources. Norway is of the opinion that an objective should also be included which deals with general education in the population's own language.

Norway is pleased that the Working Group has presented proposals which to a large extent seem to be generally applicable and which should lend themselves to winning universal support. With a view to future efforts as well, such a goal ought to result in a declaration which could actually improve the lives of indigenous populations.