

WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS
Seventeenth session
26-30 July 1999

Agenda Item 9: Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples within the United Nations

JOINT STATEMENT BY:

- (1) THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF INDIGENOUS RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT,**
- (2) THE FOUR CREE NATIONS OF HOBHEMA,**
- (3) THE GRAND COUNCIL OF CREES,**
- (4) THE INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR CONFERENCE,**
- (5) THE INTERNATIONAL INDIAN TREATY COUNCIL,**
- (6) THE JUMMA DELEGATION,**
- (7) TEBTEBBA FOUNDATION,**
- (8) ASIAN INDIGENOUS AND TRIBAL PEOPLES NETWORK,**
- (9) ASIA INDIGENOUS PEOPLES PACT,**
- (10) SIKSIKA NATION,**
- (11) CORDILLERA PEOPLES ALLIANCE – CPA,**
- (12) THE SAAMI COUNCIL,**

Delivered by John Henriksen

- (13) Ngativa Lands Trust*
- (14) Maori Legal Service*
- (15) The Griqua National Conference of South-Africa*
- (16) Chirapaq / Centro de Culturas Indias , Peru*

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Madam Chairperson,

This is a joint statement by:

- (1) The International Organization of Indigenous Resource Development,
- (2) The Four Cree Nations of Hobbema,
- (3) The Grand Council of the Crees,
- (4) The Inuit Circumpolar Conference,
- (5) The International Indian Treaty Council,
- (6) The Jumma Delegation,
- (7) TEBTEBBA Foundation,
- (8) Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network,
- (9) Asian Indigenous Peoples Pact,
- (10) Siksika Nation,
- (11) Cordillera Peoples Alliance – CPA, and
- (12) The Saami Council.

We consider a swift establishment of a permanent forum and the adoption of the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples as the most important tasks for the United Nations in the forthcoming years. All efforts should be mobilised to see these two processes completed before the end of the Decade.

We congratulate the Chairman of the ad-hoc working group on the permanent forum, Mr. van Rijssen, for the excellent way he chaired the first session of the working group. Thanks to his leadership, the ad-hoc working group was able to start to deal with concrete and detailed questions in relation to the establishment of a permanent forum. The working group was able to converge on a majority of the many outstanding issues. We express our thanks to Mr. Van Rijssen, and hope that he will be in a position to chair the working group until it has completed its task.

On the basis of the debate in the ad-hoc working group, a large number of issues were met with sufficient support to serve as a solid basis for the establishment of the Forum. The establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people in the United Nations system was broadly accepted by all involved parties. There was also broad agreement with regard to the mandate, that it should be broad and cover all issues affecting indigenous peoples.

We also welcome the broad acceptance that the Forum should be organised as an open assembly in which all governments, indigenous peoples and organisations, international and regional intergovernmental organisations, non-governmental organisations and other interested parties participate.

Furthermore, we also noted acceptance for the proposal that a core group of the Forum should be composed of a limited number of members from governments and indigenous peoples, on an equal basis, representing all regions of the world.

We have, from the beginning, advocated the principle that the permanent forum should be composed of an equal number of representatives of indigenous peoples and governments, acting as full voting members. We are of the view that indigenous peoples should be able to

participate in the Forum regardless of consultative status with ECOSOC. We also feel that individual experts should be allowed to participate in the work of the Forum, if and when called upon to do so by the Forum.

As far as the level where the Forum should be established is concerned, we are of the opinion that it should report directly to ECOSOC.

The mandate of the Forum should enable it to deal effectively with the full range of issues covered by the mandate of ECOSOC which are of concern to indigenous peoples. The mandate should include, but not be limited to, the submission of proposals, recommendations and reports to ECOSOC, and coordination of all matters pertaining to indigenous peoples. It should also be authorized to establish its own ad hoc working groups, if and when necessary.

In order to ensure that the Forum has a solid and permanent financial basis, its activities should be funded through the Regular Budget of the United Nations.

We support the many indigenous declarations proposing that a new and separate Secretariat should be established for the Forum, funded via the regular UN Budget. We do not feel that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should become the Secretariat of the Forum, due to three main reasons:

- (1) It is required that the Forum has a mandate which goes beyond human rights. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights would therefore not be a satisfactory solution, since its expertise and mandate only covers human rights.
- (2) Secondly, for too many years we have seen that the administrative and political leadership of the Office of the High Commissioner does not give indigenous issues the necessary priority, in terms of allocation of human and financial resources. Unfortunately, we do not see any signs indicating a change in this regard, and
- (3) Thirdly, we feel that the establishment of a new Secretariat would increase the possibilities of indigenous persons being assigned to key positions in the Secretariat of the Forum.

As far as the future role of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations is concerned, we are of the opinion that the Working Group should continue to exist. But we do not believe that the Working Group can meet the needs of indigenous peoples – not even with an expansion of its membership and mandate. Because it still will be at the lowest possible level of the United Nations system, and because we indigenous peoples still will be subject to the preferences and views of individual experts in its parent body, the Sub-Commission. It does not make it easier that some of these experts switch between the roles of “independent experts” and “governmental representatives”.

Madam Chairperson,

In conclusion, we express the hope that the members of the Working Group, in their final conclusions and recommendations, give their support to the establishment of a permanent forum: A forum which we desperately need, and which therefore should not be delayed any more by unnecessary discussions.

Thank you.