

STATEMENT OF THE COMMITTEE ON INDIGENOUS HEALTH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination
and Protection of Minorities
Working Group on Indigenous Populations
17th session, 26-30 July 1999

Agenda: Indigenous peoples and health - Follow up and recent developments

Madame Chairperson
Members of the Working Group
Sisters and Brothers
Representatives and Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

The Committee on Indigenous Health warmly commends the Working Group for its steadfast commitment to the issue of health. Madame, if we look back at the agenda of this Working Group since its fourteenth session in 1996, the theme of health has been a central common one that has occupied this debate constantly. Our perceptions and concerns regarding health clearly expresses our deep understanding and care for not only our selves but for the health of our Mother Earth.

This year's theme of our relationship to land has great significance for the issue of health as we perceive it. Over the past days, we have listened to our many sisters and brothers, unequivocal identification of the obvious links between our right to our lands and health. This only reiterates and justifies the continued concern for health in this forum.

Loss of our lands, waters and natural resources effectively undermines and threatens the foundations for our health and well being - our traditional health systems, medicinal plants, minerals and places of healing. We are determined to protect this foundation for our future generations.

Last year, we expressed some concern at the tardy progress made by intergovernmental and other specialised agencies dealing with health-related issues in establishing a comprehensive programme of action on indigenous health in consultation with indigenous peoples and their organisations. We are pleased to draw the attention of this assembly that the World Health Organisation, with the cooperation of the Committee on Indigenous Health, is initiating steps to finalise plans for an international consultation in November 1999. The consultation envisages the ultimate development of a broad programme of action for indigenous health at the global level within the International Decade.

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In conclusion, this Committee would recommend:

1. That the issue of indigenous peoples and health be continued to be given the attention it so rightly deserves. Particular attention should be given to the issues identified by this Committee during the fifteenth and sixteenth sessions of the Working Group.
2. That the Working Group recognise and further develop a debate on the vital linkages between indigenous knowledge and health systems, health and land for the indigenous peoples of the world.
3. That priority and special attention be accorded to the preservation of our indigenous health and knowledge systems, and medicinal plants with the necessary preservation of the heritage, particularly land, that supports these.
4. That the call for an international conference on Indigenous Health from the International Organisation of Indigenous Resource Development and the Treaty Six Nations be endorsed by the Working Group as an important international event emerging within the International Decade.
5. AND, WE SUPPORT THE PROPOSAL FOR THE WORLD INDIGENOUS NATIONS GAMES BECAUSE IT WILL CONTRIBUTE TO THE PROMOTION OF HEALTH OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES PARTICULARLY OF OUR YOUTH.

THANK YOU.