

Item 10

Nordic Saami Parliaments, Greenland Home Rule, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden

Madame Chairman,

It is a pleasure for me to take the floor under item 10 of our agenda on behalf of the Nordic Saami Parliaments, Greenland Home Rule as well as the governments of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden.

In the Nordic countries we have followed the progress of the Working Group over the years with great interest. It has been satisfactory to see how it has developed into an important forum through the use of an open and flexible working method which has provided effective access for indigenous peoples from all over the world, otherwise left without possibilities to influence the UN system.

It seems to us that this working method is essential and will continue to be so in the future. It would for instance be very unfortunate if only NGOs with consultative status at ECOSOC would be allowed to participate in the deliberations on the draft declaration in a future working group of the Commission for Human Rights. Other forums, dealing with indigenous issues, should also adopt the openness and flexibility of the Working Group to ensure a broader access of indigenous views in the UN.

We would also like to point to a supplementary way of giving access to indigenous representatives in the future work: Like the nordic delegations and others present at this meeting do, more countries should also be encouraged to include indigenous representatives in their government delegations.

As the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples now appears it will form a good basis for the deliberations of the Commission of Human Rights and we wish to congratulate you, Madame Chairman, and your colleagues in the Working Group with this achievement. We also wish to underline strongly the importance we attach to the adoption by the Working Group of the draft declaration at this particular time in the International Year.

Madame Chairman,

As it submits the draft declaration the Working Group will have reached one of its important goals.

After having been adopted by the Sub-Commission, the draft declaration will be considered by the Commission on Human Rights. At the same time, there will also be a strong need for a body to consider the problems of indigenous peoples and pave new ways in a relaxed atmosphere. It is, however, too early for us to say whether this task should be conferred to a new permanent forum or to the Working Group in its present ^{form} of a revised form.

WGIPB/CIR/4

In regard to the future activities of this body we have studied the many interesting proposals put forward by you, Madame Chairman, and we will only point to one of them as a particularly interesting suggestion: This is the idea that the "Review of Developments" agenda item could each year be structured around a thematic report, possibly with a summary of the discussion in the group as an annex to the report.

Madame Chairman,

The situation of indigenous peoples has received increased attention in recent years. It seems that the willingness of governments to act on the needs of indigenous peoples is growing. This development is, without doubt, partly due to the activities of the Working Group. However, it appears that the Working Group in its present form, for those same reasons, will not be able to meet all our future needs.

As the World Conference recommended we will have to consider the establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous peoples within the UN. We feel that it is still too early to be very specific about such a forum but some elements are becoming clearer in our discussions.

First of all, the permanent forum should be composed of representatives of governments as well as of indigenous peoples. It will require a new approach in the UN to formally elect indigenous representatives and we should all consider very carefully what the best way to do this would be.

The permanent forum should be able to deal with a range of problems related to indigenous peoples with a view to advise governments and UN bodies on a high level.

The new body should stimulate an ongoing dialogue between governments and indigenous peoples. Such a dialogue should be based on a common monitoring of the situation of indigenous peoples. The permanent forum might in this connection encourage the realisation of the draft declaration. If governments and indigenous peoples agree, it could also advise parties with a view to resolving disputes.

The question of a permanent forum has been put on the agenda of the coming decade for indigenous peoples by the World Conference and we do not wish to rush to conclusions here and now. We feel, on the other hand, that a first substantial discussion should take place in this Working Group on the basis of the substantial experience it has gained in dealing with the issue of indigenous peoples during its eleven years of existence.

Thank you, Madame Chairman.