

A STATEMENT OF OSILIGI AT THE 20th SESSION OF UNWGIP ON
24TH JULY 2002

By James M. Kaipoi



The chairperson, distinguished guests, Indigenous Peoples representatives, delegates, Governments representatives, UN agencies, ladies and gentlemen. My name is James Kaipoi, representing OSILIGI, an Indigenous Community organization working with ~~Ih~~-Laikipia Maasai of Kenya.

I wish to thank the International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs for enabling me to attend this important session of the Working Group.

I feel honoured to address this session of the working group. Having operated for the past 20 years, it is evident that the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations has achieved a lot. It served as the focal point with the UN for the promotion and protection of Indigenous Peoples' rights. It has empowered Indigenous Peoples through its own initiatives and activities over the years.

To the Indigenous Peoples of the world the UNWGIP has provided them a forum through which they meet to: share their experiences, tell the world of their situations, asking for support from the world and UN agencies to influence changes in their own Governments, and above all, provide information on human rights and international law for their own advocacy.

The UNWGIP has also provided Indigenous Peoples an opportunity to meet with donor agencies for financial support for their struggles. UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations has also over the years acted as a forum, where Indigenous Peoples meet their Government delegates and tell them of their problems without fear and intimidation. Through this, many Governments have come to recognize the Indigenous Peoples as part of their citizens.

My organization through the participation in the UNWGIP and other international fora, has managed to bring to the light of the world the plight of hundreds of Indigenous Peoples of Northern Kenya, who over the years have been victims of unexploded landmines left on their ancestral land by foreign armies.

It is just last week, after more than two years of struggle, the UK Government as part of the armies, who train on those areas, accepted to pay for the damages.

Noting these achievements and many others, I have not mentioned that members of UNWGIP would bear witness with me.

It is important that we all build on the strengths of this forum and lessons learnt for it to serve the interest of the Indigenous Peoples better. The UN and its agencies have a moral responsibility to ensure Indigenous Peoples rights are developed internationally.

The Laikipia Maasai of Kenya, whom I represent, have been living and continue to live with poverty and all sorts of human rights denial. They have been victims of historical events, and have continued to be marginalized in the independent Kenya.

They are faced with many challenges, many are caused by Modernization and Globalization. These are the challenges that the UNWGIP and the UN agencies should live to address in the future:

- I) protection and promotion of traditional knowledge
- II) protection of their culture and heritage against commercialization in the name of eco-tourism and tourism
- III) return of land lost through the 1904 Land treaties with the British Colonial Government

- IV) development and protection of their Livestock Markets
- V) protection against foreign armies and right to determine their own development as concerns land use

In conclusion, let us all accept the fact that the UNWGIP, other UN Agencies, and Indigenous Peoples still have a challenge in promoting and protecting Indigenous Peoples' rights, who are still the poorest and most disadvantaged on the planet.

Thank you.