

Permanent Forum  
May 12-23, 2003, Item 4(f)

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am Mr. Tokuhei Akibe, Vice-President of the Ainu Association of Hokkaido. We would like to make a joint statement on behalf of the Ainu Association of Hokkaido and the Shimin Gaikou Centre, regarding the state of educational attainment of the Ainu People.

The Ainu children are in an extremely disadvantaged position relative to educational attainment of others in Japanese society.

First, in public education, the Ainu families have a lower rate of children attending schools from the nursery ones to institutions of higher education; the disparity becomes much more pronounced in higher education. This is, first and foremost, due to the economic inequality between the Ainu and the Japanese, reflected in the fact that the proportion of the Ainu families on welfare is twice that of the Japanese. The Japanese government claims that policy to address these inequality exists since 1974, which is carried out by the local Hokkaido government, but even after thirty years of these measures, the disparity in education has not declined dramatically, primarily because the land rights and economic rights of the Ainu are not protected.

Furthermore, even when the Ainu children enter public schools, they are at a much higher risk of dropping out. The lower retention rate derives from the discrimination of the Ainu children in schools in addition to their disadvantaged economic background. Such discrimination in schools can be addressed by systematic education, to both Ainu and Japanese children, of the Ainu culture and history, and the Ainu people have demanded such ethnic education of the Japanese government since the 1980s. However, the government does not recognize the cultural and educational rights of the Ainu, and the Ainu Cultural Promotion Act of 1997 has not contributed much to the realization of ethnic education for the Ainu people. Consequently, the Ainu children are deprived of the opportunity to take pride in their indigenous background, which hinders their identification with the Ainu culture and history.

For these reasons, we urge the Japanese government to establish an ethnic education programme that would teach children the history and culture of the Ainu people, and to adopt as a principle of Japan's public education the traditional approach of the Ainu that values the friendly relationship between people and the nature as well as that between peoples. Only by enabling the Ainu children and parents to regain their pride in their culture and ethnic background does public education in Japan return to the state it should be in. In addition, we also urge the government to conduct survey of Ainu's living conditions by themselves, which it has been done by the local Hokkaido government every seven years as part of its social welfare policy, and to examine how ethnic education ought to be conducted in order to establish the foundation for the ethnic policy that would improve the school enrollment rate, retention rate, and unemployment rate for the Ainu people. This latter proposal, in particular, is in line with the 2001 recommendations by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

To the UN organs, we would like to request UNESCO, in particular, to initiate a regular “dialogue” on cultural and educational rights with the governments which lack of recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities in spite that existence of indigenous and minority groups are internationally recognized within their territories. We would also to request that this Permanent Forum keeps track of national implementation regarding recommendations by the UN treaty bodies, including the CERD, HRC and CRC.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.