

Indigenous Peoples Caucus of the Greater Caribbean (IPCGC)
Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 6th Session
May 23, 2007

IPCGC: Joboshirima Lokono Arawak Community; Caney Quinto Mundo; Presencia Taina; KuKarey Spiritual Circle; United Confederation of Taíno People

Wednesday, 23 May 2006, Item 9 – Future work of the Forum

Madame Chair and distinguished delegates, we thank you for this opportunity to address the plenary with regard to Agenda Item 9 – Future work of the Forum.

With this in mind and in response to Item 85 and 86¹ of the Plan of Action for the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples, the Indigenous Peoples Caucus of the Greater Caribbean recommends that Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues:

- 1) Facilitate a Special Regional Consultative Session to focus on the unique situation of Caribbean Indigenous Peoples in cooperation with other United Nations agencies. The planning and organization of such a Special Regional Consultative Session should take place in collaboration with the organizations and communities represented within the Indigenous Peoples Caucus of the Greater Caribbean as well as other regional initiatives.

Further, the full and effective participation of indigenous Taíno representatives from the island of Borikén also known today as the "Free Associated State" of Puerto Rico must be ensured without discrimination. It must also be noted that as a result of its colonial status Puerto Rico is not a member of the United Nations and therefore Taíno representatives continue to be denied funding by the UN Voluntary Fund and other programs designed to facilitate equitable indigenous participation within international meetings, conferences, regional specific consultations, and capacity building opportunities. This situation is not only discriminatory but a direct effect of institutionalized colonialism.

Madame Chair, failure to address the effects of institutionalized colonialism only serves to perpetuate colonialism and this is a direct contradiction to the goals of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. This situation renders the Taíno People "invisible" and hinders the full and

¹ (b) Regional level

85. It is recommended that the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues should hold regional meetings on indigenous issues with existing regional organizations with a view to strengthening cooperation and coordination. The Permanent Forum should support regional initiatives of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, such as the Indigenous Peoples Programme of the United Nations Development Programme in Asia.

86. It is recommended that representatives of Caribbean indigenous peoples should be included in region-specific consultations and conferences in Latin America and the Caribbean, and on steering committees for planning and implementing the programme of activities for the Second International Decade. Serious consideration should also be given to organizing a special regional consultative session focusing on the unique situation of Caribbean indigenous peoples, which would take place in the Caribbean, hosted by a Member State and a local indigenous community.

effective participation of Taíno representatives within the United Nations system.²

- 2) Invite the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of the Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous People to the Special Regional Consultative Session to review the unique situations of indigenous Caribbean communities including their claims that:
 - a. national laws and policies are discriminatory and inconsistent with international human rights laws and standards, as in the case of the recent Amerindian Act of Guyana.
 - b. Non-indigenous legal and judicial systems discriminate against Indigenous Peoples asserting, claiming and enjoying their rights to their lands, territories and resources as in the recent case of the Taíno Peoples' reclamation of the Caguana Ceremonial Grounds in Utuado, Puerto Rico.
 - c. Indigenous peoples are adversely affected by Government sponsored development, which takes place without their free prior and informed consent as in the case of the contamination of the Cuyuni river in Venezuela, which extends into Guyana and is being polluted by mining operations.
- 3) Support calls for the third expert seminar on Treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements as called for by ECOSOC take place in Waitangi, New Zealand, in February 2008 and that the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights organize the seminar, in collaboration with the indigenous host communities, States, indigenous organizations, and appropriate UN bodies. Participation of indigenous Caribbean islanders particularly Taíno representatives from the "Free Associated State of Puerto Rico" should be ensured at such a meeting without discrimination.

Madame Chair, distinguished delegates we say bo'matum (thank you) for your attention.

Statement Presented by: Mildred Gandia Reyes, UCTP

² The Insular cases demonstrate the invisible status of Puerto Rico at the national and international level. In *DeLima v Bidwell*, Justice Brown held "the Island of Porto Rico [sic] is a territory appurtenant and belonging to the United States but not part of the United States within the revenue clauses of the Constitution". Justice White concurs and clarifies Justice Brown's holding; "in an international sense Porto Rico [sic] was not a foreign country, since it was subject to the sovereignty of and was owned by the US, it was foreign to the United States in a domestic sense, because the Island had not been incorporated into the US, but was merely appurtenant thereto as a possession." These words have sealed Puerto Rico's political fate. It is continually considered a foreign nation in some instances and domestic in others. Thus at the whim of U.S. Congress, Puerto Rico is part of or apart from the U.S. at any given time, which is a situation that directly affects the indigenous Taíno Boricua People of the island. For example, to access economic support from the OAS for the purposes participating at the recent meeting of the "Points of Consensus on the OAS Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples", the Taíno were considered a "domestic concern" under the U.S. As such the Taíno did not receive an equal support opportunity to attend these and previous meetings unlike other Indigenous Peoples. With regard to the United Nations system, for over 10 years Taino representatives have applied to the UN Voluntary Fund but have yet to receive a response as to why the applications have not been considered. These situations are a clear example of the effects of colonialism on the Taino Boricua Peoples as we are inextricably linked the U.S. This institutionalized discrimination continues to affect the full and effective participation of the Taíno within the within the international system as Indigenous Peoples of the Caribbean.