

Human Rights Council

Expert Mechanism on the Rights of indigenous Peoples

Seventh Session 7 - 11 July 2014

Item 6

Study on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in
Natural Disaster Risk Reduction and Prevention and Preparedness Initiatives

Aloha,

Before our intervention, our focus is on the indigenous peoples of Ryukuu
(Okinawa) living today with what the study reviews.

This study impacts the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Islands significantly.
Also, the Hawai'i Institute for Human Rights and the Pacific Caucus in the former
Working Group on Indigenous Peoples raised elements of this study a decade
ago.

At the 21st session in 2003, the Pacific Caucus raised the issue of climate change
in connection to human rights to one of the five experts to author a report and
introduce the issue into the UN human rights charter bodies. While the first
introduction of the issue as an agenda item only produced less than a handful in
the 21st session, over two dozen indigenous peoples and allies spoke on the final
agenda item closing the final meeting ever of the UN WGIP in August 2006.

Now the rest of the world is addressing what we were alerting the world to in
the predecessor to the EMRIP.

As Bill McKibben noted, "Global warming is no longer a philosophical threat, no
longer a future threat, *no long a threat at all*. It's our reality. Even The Economist
agreed in a special survey of climate change admitting, "Global warming, it now
seems, is for real."

The most basic rights to water, worship, food, health, housing, culture, peace and
self-determination are at risk of being denied due to climate change.

We want to share the voice of indigenous peoples in the Pacific.

Asailee Yamada, Kayangel Island

"None of the big trees survived, none of the houses survived....Everything are all
wiped out."

As Taylor Sekpin, of Sapwuafik Island, observes, "I need to move but we don't
have anywhere to go. "

Teruo Hainm, of Ta Island, plainly stated, "If we don't have Taro here, we'll die.
No more food for the people of Ta. "

Rita Harugoduk, Ulithi Principal, asks an important point, humanity must

answer, “Well, if this island, you know, sink because they’ve been hearing about it what will happen to us?”

Minister Tony Debrum explains, “We are already experiencing pieces of land falling off the surface of the earth into the water due to high tides and severe intense storms...”

As Kathy Jetnili-Kijiner, poet from Marshall Islands, wrote, “I want the world to know of our resilience and our strength – that we are in no way going to just give up, pack up, and leave our islands. Our culture is rooted in our land, and our land is our life.”

The University of Hawai'i Center for Pacific Islands Studies hosted a conference bringing together impacted communities of Oceania to share their indigenous strategies for survival based in own culture. Waves of Change: Climate Change in the Pacific Islands and Implications for Hawai'i exploring the environmental, social, cultural, political and economic impacts of climate change in the Pacific Islands. We believe the findings can contribute to the recommendations of the EMRIP study for the upcoming UN HR Council session.

We look forward to collaborate and coordinate together with EMRIP in the near future at the 27th Session of the UN Human Rights Council and in the future as we note how the study is utilized to assist indigenous peoples facing climate change crisis.

We agree with the report with respect that States and international organizations should work in partnership with indigenous peoples as rights holders in disaster preparation. Indigenous peoples knowledge and relationship with their environments is invaluable to the preparation of natural disasters and in post relief. Greater participation by all is necessary in disaster risk prevention. States and communities must respect indigenous peoples linguistic and cultural heritage in this cooperation. This respect and cooperation will prevent further harm that can come from natural disasters. Finding a collaborative plan to inform all of upcoming disaster events saves lives by allowing time for preparations for indigenous peoples to inform, plan and/or evacuate their people.

However, while risk reduction and harm prevention through State and indigenous peoples collaboration is important. We argue that States must do more with respect to the ultimate causes of these natural disasters. Climate change caused by developed nations green house gas emissions is changing our earth at a devastating rate. Indigenous peoples are being forced from lands that they are spiritually and culturally connected to due to rising sea levels. Storm events have increased in frequency and intensity. Native crops are becoming harder to grow due to drought and clear cutting as we highlighted.

We look forward to assisting EMRIP to implement the findings in this study to ensure the fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples are respected, protected and fulfilled.