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WGIP90/UN/10

**Bahá'í International Community statement
to the
United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention
of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities**

**Working Group on Indigenous Populations
Eighth Session**

**Agenda item 4: Standard-setting activities: evolution of standards
concerning the rights of indigenous populations**

**23 July-3 August 1990
Geneva**

The Bahá'í International Community congratulates the Working Group on the progress it has made in identifying and formulating international standards to govern the situation of Indigenous Peoples throughout the world. The plight of indigenous peoples is a complex and challenging issue for the global community, requiring both the setting of standards as well as effective actions that will create new attitudes. It is in this spirit that we offer the following thoughts and suggestions with respect to the draft Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The principle of "unity in diversity" is, we believe, central to improving the situation of indigenous peoples. This principle suggests on the one hand that the fundamental oneness and wholeness of the human race can be understood and expressed only through cultural diversity and not uniformity. On the other hand, it suggests that particularistic interests must be subordinated to the paramount interests of the whole of humankind. Such valuable diversity, therefore, should not preclude the overriding task of creating a unified world civilization. This is the approach animating the efforts of Bahá'ís throughout the world, including Bahá'ís in indigenous communities, who strive to contribute to the unfoldment of an all-embracing world civilization.

Furthermore, it is important to consider how this concept of "unity in diversity" may relate to the "collective right to maintain and develop (indigenous) ethnic and cultural characteristics and distinct identity" and the "individual and collective right to protection against ethnocide", enumerated respectively in Articles 4 and 5 of Part II of the Draft Declaration. We view such protection as indispensable not only for the struggle of indigenous peoples themselves, but also for humanity as a whole. Indigenous peoples have nurtured certain unique characteristics within their cultures which can greatly contribute to the advancement of humankind. Reverence for the natural environment, a profound appreciation of the collective dimensions of spirituality, a deep sense of kinship and unity, sharing and consultation - these all figure prominently as cultural foundations which allow indigenous peoples to develop their own manifold potentials and to benefit from cross-cultural influences on an equal footing with other cultures. These same characteristics can enable indigenous peoples to progressively exercise well-informed and effective spiritual leadership in an era of history characterized by the irresistible forces of global integration. In this respect, we warmly support the part of the preamble of the Draft Declaration which reads: "Considering that all peoples and human groups have contributed to the progress of civilizations and cultures which constitute the common heritage of humankind... ."

Accordingly, we would like to suggest that the foregoing approach be incorporated in the Draft Declaration, in particular in Part II. For example, Article 11 could be amended to contain specific reference to the benefits of cross-cultural influences and to the global context of cultural diversity. Therefore the first part of Article 11 could be expanded to read: "The right to promote inter-cultural information and education and

to have access to cross-cultural resources, recognizing the dignity and diversity of their cultures, history and aspirations, and their past and present contribution to the common heritage of humankind...".

In emphasizing once again our view that "unity in diversity" could well be a valuable guiding principle in the deliberations of the Working Group, we welcome most warmly the extensive progress the Working Group has made since its inception in 1982.