



Working Group on Indigenous Populations

Geneva, 26-30 July 1999

Statement by Denmark on behalf of the Nordic countries and Estonia

Item 9:

Consideration of the establishment of a
Permanent Forum for Indigenous People

WGIP 99 GOV/EUR. DNK/2

(check against delivery)

Thank you, Madam Chairperson,

On behalf of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Saami Parliaments of Finland, Norway and Sweden, and the Greenland Home Rule Government, I would like to address the Working Group on Indigenous Populations under agenda item 9 - Consideration of the establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people.

We note with satisfaction that ECOSOC a few days ago confirmed resolution 1999/52 adopted by the 55th Session of the Commission on Human Rights. The open-ended inter-sessional ad hoc working group will thus meet again - this time for eight days prior to the 56th session of the Commission and with a view to completing its task. As we all know, the Commission has asked the ad hoc working group to submit one or more concrete proposals on the establishment of a permanent forum.

Looking back at the successful first meeting of the ad hoc working group this task should not be too difficult. As the report from the meeting shows, substantive and considerable progress was made through an intensive "down-to-business" dialogue which clearly narrowed down the differences of opinion on the modalities for such a forum. We urge all parties concerned to demonstrate the same spirit of cooperation and participate actively and constructively in the second meeting of the ad hoc working group. It is our clear opinion that establishment of the permanent forum is within reach in the framework of the International Decade for Indigenous People, if we so wish. A number of issues still need to be discussed and to find a form that will be acceptable to all parties concerned. But if there is a will there is a way.

Madam Chairperson,

A growing number of initiatives are being taken in international organisations with regard to indigenous issues. We welcome these initiatives aimed at strengthening international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous peoples. In 1996 the Secretary General in his report to the 51st session of the United Nations General Assembly (doc. A/51/493) stated that quote "The fact that there are now a number of indigenous-related programmes and projects being implemented and planned by United Nations agencies only underlines the striking absence of a mechanism to ensure regular exchange of information among the concerned and interested parties - Governments, the United Nations system and indigenous people - on an ongoing basis" unquote.

Half way through the Decade this is regrettably still the state of the play. The only way to remedy this situation is to establish the permanent forum for indigenous people in the UN-system. Let us move on!

Madam Chairperson,

To prepare for the second meeting of the ad hoc working group, we wish to encourage all governments and indigenous peoples to carefully study the report from the first meeting and to seriously consider the various proposals already put forward concerning the mandate of the forum, its membership and participation, the UN body to which it should report, as well as the financial and the secretariat implications.

For results to be achieved at the second meeting, we find it of particular importance that we all focus on proposals that seem to gain considerable support already. We must maintain the momentum gained during the first meeting of the working group.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.