

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
Second session

Geneva, 10-14 August 2009

Statement on Item 3

Translating the right of indigenous peoples to education into action

Thank you, Mme. Chairperson,

Firstly, I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate the Expert Mechanism on the presentation of the study.

One central aspect of this study EMRIP (A/HRC/EMRIP/2009/2), which is especially focussed upon in section III B, is the integration of indigenous perspectives into the mainstream education. However, shouldn't we try to avoid a position according to which indigenous perspectives would only play a subordinate role with regard to the education of indigenous children and youth? If indigenous peoples are to be adjudicated autonomy of raising and educating their younger generations, then the question should be: How to integrate mainstream education into the culturally specific indigenous education.

In the light of the problems that indigenous peoples are facing, every measure taken should be scrutinised as to the impact on the respective indigenous people regarding the questions, will it support their existence as a community, as a culture, as a people, as a social system, or does it contain factors that lead to destabilisation, or even disintegration. Does the particular form of education strengthen the indigenous identity of the children and youth, or will this identity be stunted, as there is only room for some folklore, but not for a culture to be fully lived? It is outmost important that the education takes place in the traditional outward appearance, because this is the basis for the constitution of the identity. Any compromise in this respect would inevitably compromise the development of an indigenous identity. Hence, it should also be avoided to "integrate" indigenous pupils into external boarding schools, because this is a tool to almost certainly eradicate their indigenous self-confidence, due to psychological mechanisms of cultural dominance.

It also has to be mentioned that the curriculum should not only be defined by state authorities, to which even the fields of indigenous knowledge, like the use of specific plants, are unknown. Therefore, it is necessary that indigenous authorities participate in the planning of education, as addressed in the EMRIP study (A/HRC/EMRIP/2009/2).

Thank you, Mme. Chairperson.