

United Nations Commission on Human Rights  
Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights  
Working Group on Indigenous Populations  
20<sup>th</sup> anniversary  
22-26 July 2002



Rehab Hope Fund  
(Oral intervention by Dr. Godwin Orkeh)

Thank you Mr. Chairman Sir:

Greetings from the Urhobo Nation in Nigeria. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak. This is my first exposure to the WGIP, and I quite appreciate the good work being done. I affirm un-equivocally the need to sustain the Working Group and support the statement by the Indigenous Caucus.

Distinguished members of the Working Group, Representatives of UN specialized agencies, Representatives of governments and NGO, my indigenous brothers and sisters: there is a need for an open dialogue with the various indigenous nations who are endangered and fast losing their identities.

As a Physician, I have seen many deprivations and abuses directly resulting from a lack of international standards being applied to corporate entities. Our wells, streams, and rivers are polluted. The fish are dead. The farm lands poisoned. My people are getting sick. The youth who demand justice and change are branded as terrorists. Without clear, internationally-accountable standards, for how long will this go on?

I serve in a deeply rural area of 17,000-25,000 souls, covering an extremely difficult terrain with minimal government health presence. Diseases, ignorance, and poverty are rife. What can be done?

1. There is need for more in-depth studies to be made on how to provide health to difficult-to-reach peoples who are invariably poor and indigenous.
2. There is a need for the International Community to continue their pressure on the multinational companies to stop their rape of the land; and to require, via international norms, that proper Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) surveys be conducted **before** prospecting and that the maintenance of International Safety Standards in all their operations be implemented and monitored.
3. The Working Group must be called to set these international standards and monitor their effectiveness.
4. We have our traditional, cultural and religious beliefs handed down through generations. These systems should go hand-in-hand with the 'modern' medicines bringing a holistic approach to healing. Crucial to this process is informed consent.

The Right to Health is basic and universal.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Godwin Orkeh", with a horizontal line drawn underneath it.