

PERMANENT MISSION OF DENMARK

Geneva



United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations,
19. Session, 23 - 27 July, 2001

Statement by the Greenland Home Rule Government and
Denmark

Agenda item 5: Review of Developments Pertaining to the
Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and
Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous People:
General statement

First of all, allow me, Madame Chairperson, to congratulate you on your reelection as chair for the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations.

It is a pleasure to be given the opportunity to report on some of the recent developments and events in Greenland and Denmark regarding indigenous rights and issues.

Madame Chairperson, as you are well aware, the Greenland Rome Rule in partnership with the Danish government have been very active in UN Human Rights fora as well as in many other fora and fields in promoting the rights of indigenous people.

In many of our joint achievements within the UN , and most recently with the decision by ECOSOC to establish the Permanent forum on indigenous issues, the fingerprints of a joint Greenlandic-Danish partnership are to be found.

It was in context of this partnership, that the idea to have Denmark formulate a strategy for support to indigenous peoples developed. The idea sprang out of the recognition, that indigenous peoples worldwide were heavily affected by development policies and programmes. Thus it was important that whatever development initiatives were taken, by national and international development agencies, they should in the minimum not have a destructive impact on the life, rights, security and cultures of indigenous peoples. Rather the ambition should be to provide indigenous peoples with opportunities for forging their own development.

In 1994, Denmark issued the Strategy for Danish Support to Indigenous Peoples. The strategy is a political platform , which has defined the Danish position on indigenous issues, and also an operational document, formulating a number of specific aims for Danish international development co-operation at bilateral and at multilateral level. Denmark was one of the first countries to develop such a Strategy.

At a debate in the Danish Parliament in May 2000, the Minister for Development co-operation informed the Parliament that a review of the Strategy was planned, "in order to improve an instrument which has served us well for six years now". The Minister announced that instead of conducting a traditional review, the review was to be undertaken by a team of indigenous people in order to have an assessment of the Strategy seen from an indigenous perspective. In order to emphasize the close co-operation between Denmark and Greenland on indigenous issues, the Minister furthermore emphasized that the team would include one person from Greenland.

The review that has now ended was conducted by Alfredo Viteri, Quichua, from Ecuador, Naomi Kipuri, Maasai from Kenya, and Raja Devasish Roy, Chakma from Bangladesh and the undersigned acting as a representative of the Greenland Home Rule Government. The team has had the opportunity to consult with a wide range of individuals, organisations, agencies and institutions, indigenous and non-indigenous. Likewise, we held a series of workshops with primarily indigenous participants here in Geneva, as well as in the countries we visited. I would here like to take the opportunity to thank all of you who contributed in some way or other, by either big or small contributions towards a successful outcome of the review.

In the conclusions, the Strategy is commended for its rights-based approach to indigenous peoples and its multi-faceted approach which has allowed Denmark to focus on areas of crucial importance for indigenous peoples on a number of levels. The most important conclusion is that principally the Strategy covers all relevant areas and that there is no real need for revising the substantive policy. However, the team recommends that concrete implementation guidelines be developed that will assist that officials, programme officers and diplomats of the Danish Foreign Ministry and the Danish Agency for International Development Cooperation (Danida) in their work. Furthermore, Denmark is commended for having invited indigenous peoples to conduct the review. And an over-all recommendation is also that Denmark seeks the advice of indigenous people in the design and implementation of projects and programs affecting them.

The report can be read in its full and be downloaded of the Home Page of the Danish Foreign Ministry (www.um.dk)

The report and its recommendations will now be fed into the internal review process of the Danish Foreign Ministry as part of its revisal of its over all Strategy for Development Cooperation. It is hoped that a new revised Strategy for Support to Indigenous People will be adopted in early 2002.

Now, let me now turn to current developments in Greenland.

As many of you will know, we, in Greenland, achieved Home Rule in 1979. The decision to introduce Home Rule, which have meant full autonomy in virtually all societal matters was taken by a referendum in Greenland in 1978. The Greenland Home Rule Act is an act of the Danish Parliament honoring the decision of people in Greenland at the referendum.

We have now had Home Rule for more than 20 years. We have been through rapid and dynamic change since the introduction of Home Rule. We have lived through exciting and enthusiastic years and have tackled many challenges under way. The

scope of autonomy that we enjoy goes beyond what was foreseen by the founders of Home Rule. Furthermore, in today's Home Ruled Greenland, we carry responsibilities and exercise self-reliance that required that we take stock of our situation. On this background a decision was made last year in the Greenland Parliament to establish a Self- Rule Commission.

The task of the Commission of the Self-Rule is to prepare a report on the possibilities for expanding Greenland's autonomy within the Danish Commonwealth, based on the principle of conformity between rights and responsibilities. According to the Terms of Reference of the Commission on Self-Rule, the Commission shall describe the Home Rule's current position with respect to constitutional law - including questions of jurisdiction and delegation between the central and the Home Rule government - and identify and describe alternative arrangements that will better satisfy self-government aspirations within the Danish Commonwealth. Of the areas that the Commission shall explore are those areas that today are vested within the central government, being the Danish government, such as security policy, foreign affairs and the judicial system. Furthermore, the Commission shall put forward proposals for moving Greenland further in the direction of economic self-sufficiency.

In cause of its work, the Commission has made their preliminary results known to a wider circle and has thereby been able to obtain immediate feedback on its ideas.

The Commission, that is made up of representatives of all the political parties in Greenland and well respected experts, acting in their individual capacity, will be submitting its report to the Greenland Home Rule Government in year 2002.

The Greenland Home Rule hopes that the results of the report will constitute the basis for a rich public debate that will foster the visions and constructive ideas for how we move forward in shaping the future of Greenlandic society.

Madame Chairperson, in its statement the other day the representative of the ICC made a reference to a very important decision made by the Governing Body of the International Labour Organisation in March 2001.

The Governing Body of the ILO made the following decision: "The Committee considers there be no basis for considering the inhabitant of the (Thule) Uummannaq community to be a "people" separate and apart from other Greenlanders. This does not necessarily appear relevant to the determination of this representation, however, for there is nothing in the convention that would indicate that only distinct peoples may make land claims, especially as between different indigenous or tribal groups."

By the time of Danish ratification of ILO Convention 169 a Declaration was signed jointly by the Government of Denmark and the Greenland Home Rule Authorities. Paragraph 1 of this Declaration states that "There is only one indigenous people in Denmark in the sense of Convention 169, viz. the original population of Greenland, the Inuit."

Madame Chairperson, I will provide you and your colleagues of the Working Group with a copy of the above mentioned decision of ILO's Governing Body.

Thank you, qujanaq