



COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-Commission on the Promotion
and Protection of Human Rights
Working Group on Indigenous Populations
Twenty-Third Session
18-22 July 2005

Item 7b: State of the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations

Intervention by Les Malezer

Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action

Mr Chairperson, we are pleased to note the contents of the two papers submitted under this agenda item and thank the Secretariat and other contributors to these reports.

In our intervention we wish to raise three matters, being greater assistance to the Pacific Region, fundraising, and Australia's participation in the funds.

It is very satisfying to note the successes of the funds in assisting Indigenous Peoples. Our response to these successes should be that more can be done, and to set about achieving more.

The Pacific region continues to be under-represented in all UN meetings concerning Indigenous Peoples. We realise that applications for assistance are not being lodged and therefore welcome and support the recommendations from the technical seminar regarding dissemination of information on the funds.

I personally am always reporting on the radio programs and newspapers in Australia, especially the indigenous media, on the work being undertaken in the United Nations. I would be very pleased to highlight the work of the funds and promote greater participation. To do so I would appreciate some media promotional material about the funds. Could we therefore request the Trustees to prepare promotional material for use through public media outlets by Indigenous Peoples organisations?

In the Pacific region there are approximately 25 States and Territories with Indigenous populations. Unfortunately representatives at this and other meetings come from only four or five of these States and Territories. Thanks to the work of the Pacific Caucus and our regional consultations we can present information from approximately half of these States and Territories, but that is not enough. If we consider the Pacific region is one of seven indigenous regions of the world we do not achieve one-seventh (~15%) of the beneficiaries of the funds, but we are currently around two percent (2%).

Is it possible for the Pacific Region to be identified separately in the reports to help address the inequality? Also is it possible for a representative from the Pacific region to be on the board of trustees?

Mr Chairperson, we thank the contributors to the funds for their support. Let all participants at this session appreciate that contributions to the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations, including pledges, have been made by Algeria, Bolivia, Canada, Chile, Canada, Estonia, Finland, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and Venezuela. Especially, we acknowledge Finland as apparently the greatest current contributor, but we welcome even the humble contributions from States such as Bolivia. But where are the other States? Can we ask the States who are participating in these meetings to contribute out of moral duty? Are we going too far to request that State delegations who are here provide pledges before they leave the room today, if they have not already contributed.

Mr Chairperson, I would like to especially appeal to those States who are contributing, to consider asking other States to join their efforts. Could Finland, for example, urge the Russian Federation to match, or supplement, their (Finland's) contributions? Can the regional blocs make contributions through joint pledges? And where are the contributions from the Asian and African States?

We apologise if our attention to the contributors establishes an unfair perspective of States' efforts in Indigenous affairs, but it is important that the participants and observers at this and other sessions make some effort to encourage greater contribution by the States.

We also remind the Working Group, as we did at the last session, that contributions from the private sector should be increased. Perhaps one way of achieving such contributions might be to call for support for particular activities, especially under the Voluntary Fund for the Decade. Private sector donors might be more willing to be associated with specific projects and specific regional activities.

Finally, Mr Chairperson, we note that the government of Australia, which recently resumed the \$1.0 billion budget of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, has still not contributed to either of the Voluntary Funds. In fairness, we have heard a rumour that Australia will contribute to the fund but we have heard that rumour for over a year now. That is a long time for a government to authorise and release a humble amount like, say, \$50,000. Could they please hurry up and make a decision to support the funds?

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.