

**Statement by Expert Member Dr. Wilton Littlechild, I.P.C.,  
Eleventh Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 7-18 May 2012  
Agenda Item 7: Half-Day Discussion on the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples  
14 May 2012**

Thank you, Mr. President. First, let me thank the Plurinational state of Bolivia, Mexico and other states who supported our calls for a World Conference. We welcome the decision to appoint the co-facilitators and thank the Global Coordinating Committee for all their preparatory work to date. The World Conference will be a historic opportunity to advance the recognition and respect of the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

As a delegate since the first meetings in Kiruna and Geneva in 1977, we have witnessed significant progress on the initial instructions of our elders. The preparatory discussions will allow us to take stock, to evaluate and to set out a path for the future that considers the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as a framework for Reconciliation.

Mr. President, when we began this journey to seek justice in the international arena, it was due to concerns of our elders, leaders and members of our Treaty territories about the willful violation of our Treaties as sacred agreements. Since it was Treaties that brought us here, they have been the basis of our participation, so we would now propose and recommend Treaties, Agreements and Constructive Arrangements be a fundamental forum of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. As partnerships for action they are a positive way forward. Since the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* will be a central and primary purpose for realization and pursuit of its objectives, we respectfully restate our call for consideration of the following actions to move the process towards a successful World Conference:

1. Recognizing that challenges remain as UN Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro stated in opening this 11<sup>th</sup> session, "A great deal remains to be done to see the objectives of the United Nations *Declaration* become a reality." It is likewise for the goals and objectives of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples. The First Decade theme was "Partnership in Action," the second was "A Decade for Action and Dignity." As I stated at the side event on the World Conference here last Wednesday, we need a continued focus on actions to be highlighted. We respectfully urge all delegations here to support our call for a Third Decade with the theme, "Action on Self-Determination." We need to take this historically significant opportunity to further the realization of the rights of Indigenous Peoples, in particular, Treaty rights in a way that includes children, youth, women, elders and people with disabilities.

2. As the preamble of the *UN Declaration* states, "*Considering* also that Treaties, Agreements and other Constructive Agreements and the relationship they represent, are the basis for a strengthened partnership between indigenous peoples and states." We respectfully reiterate our call for the appointment of an Indigenous Co-Chair to jointly

preside over the plenary meetings of the World Conference, reflective of the Treaty partnership. Furthermore, based on the good practice and experience at the Inter-Sessional Working Group on the Draft Declaration that a drafting team be appointed with rights-holders represented, we recommend that the Inter-Agency Support Group, states and Indigenous peoples' representatives all be represented at all meetings or roundtables and that such meetings be also co-chaired by Indigenous Peoples' representatives.

3. We reiterate our call, as the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, that the full, direct and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples, at all stages of the World Conference process, including the outcome, is of vital importance to ensure its success and sustainability. Recall also that the UN Human Rights Council has requested the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Office of Legal Affairs to prepare a detailed document on ways and means of promoting participation at the UN of Indigenous Peoples' representatives, as they are not always organized as non-governmental organizations but as Indigenous Nations, councils, parliaments and traditional and other forms of governments and governance institutions.

4. As to the discussion on consecutive, informal, interactive roundtable meetings and since the three UN Indigenous-specific mechanisms are specifically mentioned in Resolution 65/198, it would be important to incorporate the respective mandated areas as a programme of work that reflects national, regional and global dimensions and perspectives in a focused manner. In this regard, the thematic elements of the right to self-determination could include: (1) Treaties, (2) Education, (3) Health, (4) Culture, (5) Development, (6) Environment, (7) Human Rights, (8) Recommendations of Studies and Reports and (9) to (12) Other matters such as spirituality and dispute resolution mechanisms. These will all inform us as to elements of the right to self-determination and the focus of the implementation of the UN *Declaration* as a framework for Reconciliation.

Mr. Chairperson, we need continued focus on Indigenous peoples' rights at the international level, in particular, at the UN. This can be accomplished with the establishment of a Third International Decade. As self-determination is the foundation of the UN *Declaration* and there is a universal call for its implementation, now is the time, now is the opportunity, for all UN members states and agencies and Indigenous Nations and Peoples and their representatives as an act of Reconciliation to restore respectful relationships in partnership, action and dignity. It begins with a new Decade of Action on implementing our right to self-determination as envisioned by our elders. Thank you.