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STATEMENT BY THE INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR CONFERENCE

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Thank you for this opportunity to address the Sixth Session of the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples (WGIP). Since Inuit and other indigenous peoples worldwide are not and have never been mere "populations", our organization, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, will respectfully use the term "peoples" when referring to this important U.N. Working Group.

The Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) is an international organization, whose head office is currently based in Canada. Our members are made up of Inuit from Alaska, Greenland and Canada. Since 1983, the ICC has enjoyed non-governmental organization (NGO) status at the United Nations.

At the same time as the session begins today, the ICC is responding to a long-standing human rights issue. We seek to reunite Soviet Inuit with us -- their blood relatives in Alaska as well as with Inuit in Canada and Greenland.

The ICC continues to encourage the Soviet government to allow the Inuit (Yuit) of Siberia to freely participate as full members in our organization. At this very moment, ICC President, Mary Simon and other Executive members are travelling to the Soviet Union to visit with the Siberian Yuit. Hopefully, meetings will also be arranged with Soviet government representatives in Moscow, with a view to permanently resolving this basic human rights question.

In regard to our circumpolar regions, there continues to be a serious lack of coherent and comprehensive government policies that might accommodate our political, environmental, economic, social, cultural and peace and security concerns. As a result, the ICC is increasingly taking the initiative and is involving itself in a number of far-reaching projects.

We are proceeding with the formulation of Arctic principles on a wide-range of subject matters with both domestic and foreign policy dimensions. As part of our defense and arms control work, we are examining the feasibility of establishing a transboundary Arctic nuclear-weapons-free zone by international agreement or treaty.

Currently, the ICC is developing an Inuit Regional Conservation Strategy (IRCS) to implement the World Conservation Strategy (WCS) in Arctic regions. To our knowledge, the IRCS will be the world's first transnational strategy to implement the WCS. In June 1988, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) honored the ICC as one of the 1988 recipients of the Global 500 Award for its "successes on the front lines of the global cause of protecting and improving the environment". To further our participation and to share our traditional knowledge in international bodies, we have recently become voting members of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN).

Through the ICC, we will continue to contribute our knowledge, perspectives and values in these and other key policy areas. However, we must point out that our national governments, with the exception of Greenland and Denmark, are still not very supportive of our work. Nor are they enthusiastic to include our direct input.

We desperately lack financial resources for our specific projects. Too often, we do not have sufficient control in dealing with our extensive circumpolar interests. While Canadian and U.S. governments make positive statements about aboriginal self-government, they still exclude us from policy-making and decision-making in major matters that directly affect us and the Arctic.

Recent examples, where exclusion of indigenous peoples is more the dominant theme than meaningful collaboration, include: (1) the 1988 Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, which fails to specifically address indigenous economic problems and concerns; (2) the 1988 Canada-U.S. Agreement on Arctic Cooperation, for which Inuit were accorded no prior opportunity whatsoever for collaboration; and (3) the 1987 Meech Lake Constitutional Accord, which seriously prejudices the rights and future of aboriginal peoples in Canada.

In regard to Arctic militarization, we are beginning to feel that the Soviet Union is more interested in having a serious dialogue with us on military, defense and arms control matters than our national governments.

As these and other issues would suggest, governments still persistently pursue their own agendas with little or no dedicated attention to our basic rights, aspirations, priorities and concerns. What indigenous peoples require is appropriate direct access to national and international institutions. We also seek to establish an overall legal framework by which to guide and measure the conduct of governments. It is for these reasons that international standard-setting processes, such as those carried out by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and WGIP, could prove to be critical at this time.

A recent development is the ILO revision process concerning the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention 107. The June 1988 ILO Conference in Geneva marked the first time in over 30 years that indigenous peoples were afforded any opportunity to modify the assimilationist orientation of the Convention. While significant changes are being proposed for certain parts of the Convention, we remain deeply concerned that indigenous peoples have no way of directly participating in the revision process.

We still have no way of safeguarding our most fundamental and inalienable rights. The world's indigenous peoples are on

the outside fringes of the process looking in, as governments, workers and employers decide (in some cases arbitrarily) to what degree an amended Convention 107 should recognize our inherent rights.

The ICC and other indigenous organizations have urged the International Labour Conference to introduce new and meaningful ways of substantially increasing our involvement during the second year of the revision process. Full indigenous input will be crucial since the issues that have not been properly addressed and which have been deferred to next year include the following:

(1) "Peoples" vs. "populations". It is presently uncertain whether Convention 107 will continue to refer to the world's indigenous peoples as "populations", or whether we will rightfully be described as distinct "peoples". We believe that it is imperative that the Convention be amended so as not to depict indigenous peoples in inaccurate and demeaning terms.

While some governments and employer representatives are prepared to use the term "peoples" in the Convention, they seek to impose qualifications that would unjustly restrict the meaning of the term and would weaken the position of indigenous peoples. These proposed limitations go beyond the purposes and scope of the Convention and are clearly unacceptable; and

(ii) Lands and resources. Lack of consensus or agreement among ILO participants has led the issues of lands and resources to be deferred to next year. If Convention 107 is to be transformed into a useful and enduring instrument, our fundamental territorial and resource rights must be fully respected by its terms. Effective recognition and protection of these basic rights are without a doubt the very soul of a revised Convention.

In regard to natural resources, it is essential to include explicit reference to both surface and subsurface rights, since any exploitation of the subsoil is likely to threaten the integrity and enjoyment of our lands and surface resources. In addition, a comprehensive mechanism for resolving disputes concerning our land and resource rights and treaty rights and obligations should be included in the Convention.

In the coming year, we hope to further refine and improve other vital aspects of ILO's proposed revisions. These include administrative and interpretative aspects, education and language rights, and respect for our customary laws and practices. As we have already indicated to the ILO, confining recognition of our customary laws to those compatible with the national legal system will inevitably result in serious and unjust cases of assimilation.

The Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities has concluded that there is an "urgent need to promote and protect indigenous rights by means of a continued and comprehensive review of developments in this field, as well as through the evolution of standards". These international standards are to be developed by the Working Group "particularly by means of the preparation of a draft declaration of principles on indigenous rights".

In view of its mandate, the WGIP should explicitly include in the draft declaration principles concerning our environmental, economic, social, cultural and political rights. In particular, we believe the Working Group should fully address the following issues, among others: use of the term "peoples"; self-determination; lands and resources, including surface and subsurface rights; treaty-making and treaty-rights; and customary law and practices. Proper elaboration of these matters would set a useful and positive example for other standard-setting processes, such as the revision of Convention 107. This Working Group must be prepared to play a leading and pioneering role.

In addition, we would suggest that greater attention be given to General Assembly resolution 41/120 of 4 December 1986, entitled "setting of international standards in the field of human rights". Consistent with paragraphs 4(c) and (d) of the resolutions, WGIP's draft declaration of principles should include more than a broad listing of indigenous rights. It

should also describe the corresponding obligations of governments so as to more fully identify acceptable standards. Further mechanisms for the implementation of rights and the carrying out of obligations should be specifically contemplated by the draft declaration. This would include complaint procedures, dispute resolutions, monitoring and reporting functions.

Madame Chairperson, a final issue that we wish to raise today relates to our fundamental collective rights. We are deeply disturbed that at least one government appears to be intent on denying us full and proper recognition of our collective rights as indigenous peoples. Inadequate recognition of our basic collective rights continues to have far-reaching and diverse adverse impacts on our vulnerable societies. Since our concerns about collective rights are linked to the WGIP standard-setting process, we will address this matter under the next agenda item..

Thank you for your time and attention.