

NUBA MOUNTAINS SOLIDARITY ABROAD

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Statement by

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UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations
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Madam Chairperson

Distinguished Members of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations

Distinguished Members of Observer Governments

Brothers and Sisters delegates of Indigenous Peoples.

My name is Suleiman Musa Rahnal.

On behalf of the indigenous Nuba people of Sudan, I would like to congratulate you Madame Chairperson and the Distinguished Members of the Working Group for the completion of the draft declaration. Also Madame Chairperson, if you allow me, I would like to send my greetings and thanks to the Secretary General of the United Nations, H.E. Boutros Boutros-Ghali and to all members of United Nations for declaring 1993 Year of the Indigenous Peoples, in recognition of their rights as Members of the world community.

Madam Chairperson, it is indeed an honour to address this honourable house and the members of the international community on this occasion. This is the first time in our long history of struggle for survival that the voice of the Nuba people is to be heard across the world.

Today, as we know, in many member countries of the United Nations, there are 300 million Indigenous Peoples whose basic and fundamental rights are being systematically denied through the use of violence, suppression, forced assimilation, forced imposition and indoctrination, forced dispossession and exploitation.

For all these reasons I appeal to you Madame Chairperson and to the Distinguished Members of the Working Group to double your momentous efforts in order to speed up the process of finalising the draft declaration, upon which the future and the survival of many Indigenous peoples around the world depend.

Madam Chairperson, I believe that at present there is no international law that can protect and defend the collective rights of the indigenous Nuba people of Sudan, whose identity and cultural heritage, one of the oldest in Africa is facing virtual extinction. It is therefore, Article 3, 11 and 24 are of significant importance which will undoubtedly give people like the Nuba the right of self-determination and the right to maintain and develop their culture and the over all control over their lands.

It is now clear that former colonial policies are responsible for much of the misery that besets the Indigenous Peoples in the world today. At Sudan's independence in 1956, the Nuba people were given on a plate by colonial administration to Sudanese Arabs who, in effect, became their colonial masters.

If it had not been for the colonial policies, the Nuba people would probably not find themselves today victims of genocide, repression, exploitation and ethnic cleansing.

It's our hope that the international community and Britain in particular as the former colonial power, will recognise its moral duty and obligation to set right some of the past injustices and offer practical and moral support to the Nuba people.

Madam Chairperson, today my people, the Nuba, the Indigenous people of Central Sudan are fighting for their collective rights. We are fighting for our basic political rights, socio-economical rights, the rights of cultural autonomy, the right of identity as Nuba, the right to have control over our lands, territories and finally the right of self-determination.

The Nuba Mountains in Central Sudan, home to over a million Nuba peoples, are sealed off from the outside world while whole villages are devastated by helicopter gunships, bomber aircrafts and armed Arab militia. Survivals are forced into relocated camps in the harsh desert where hunger and disease are rampant. International aid agencies are forbidden to bring relief to the area. Women in camps are raped and children abducted and subjected to indoctrination to strip them of their cultural identity.

The Nuba land have been taken over by the government and it's now been sold to politically powerful merchants farmers to extend the mechanised agricultural schemes. Educated Nuba have been arrested and murdered by the security forces.

Jihad or holy war has been declared against the Nuba and the government is now using Jihad as means of nation building up to destroy its own people.

Recent visit by the British Member of Parliament Baroness (Caroline) Cox between 6-13 of this month, indicates that the situation regard to human rights violations is still a cause of major concern.

We hope that in this year of the world's Indigenous Peoples the international community and in particular the United Nations, will take more positive and serious practical measures to alleviate the sufferings of the indigenous Nuba peoples and the peoples of Southern Sudan. We appeal to them to provide immediate protection and support to those people whose very survival, like my own people, the Nuba of Sudan, is much threatened and facing virtual disappearance. We specifically appeal to the United Nations:

1. to intervene and to create safe havens in order to save the lives of the Nuba people;

2. to put pressure on the Sudan government to allow humanitarian aid and international non-governmental organisations to go to the Nuba Mountains area;
3. to put pressure on the Sudan government to withdraw all military forces from the Nuba Mountains;
4. to ensure that the Sudan government stops the forced relocation of the Nuba people of Sudan;
5. to put pressure on the Sudan government to end the civil war which is threatening the lives of millions of people and to find the lasting peace in Sudan;
6. to exert its influence on all military, political and religious factions in Sudan to reach a political settlement to the present war, and to ensure that any resolution to the conflict contains measures recognising the rights of the Nuba and all other Indigenous Peoples of Sudan.

Thank you.