

3rd session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

New York, New York, 10 - 21 May, 2004

Agenda Item 7; Future Work

Joint intervention by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Commission (ATSIC), African Indigenous Women's Organization, Asian Indigenous Peoples Pact, Bahn Literature Forum, Buffalo River Dene Nation, Clan Star Inc., Consejo de Todas Las Tierras, Consejo Indio de Sud America, Core Manipur, Foundation for Aboriginal and Islanders Research Action (FAIRA), Indigenous Information Network, Hawaii Institute for Human Rights, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC), Jumma Peoples Network, Kus-Kura-Costa Rica, Native Children's Survival, Peace Campaign Group, Saami Council, Taungya, Teton Sioux Nation Treaty Council, Tebtebba Foundation and Trinamul Unnayan Sangstha

Thank you Mr. Chairperson,

This is a joint intervention by some 20 + indigenous and support organisations.

We, the undersigned indigenous organizations, would like to draw the attention of the Permanent Forum and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) on a matter of deep concern to us. However, we would also like to stress that this letter does not intend to express distrust of any persons employed by the Permanent Forum, all of whom have our deepest respect.

During the process of establishing the Permanent Forum, indigenous peoples often stressed the importance of indigenous peoples being in charge of the Permanent Forum Secretariat. We received substantial support for this sentiment among states. Thus, since the inception of the Permanent Forum and its secretariat, the understanding has always been that priority should be given to persons of indigenous descent when staffing the Permanent Forum Secretariat, should there be qualified indigenous candidates.

Also, the Permanent Forum itself, in the report from its 2nd session, recommended that in staffing the secretariat of the Forum, due consideration should be given to qualified indigenous youth applicants. Even though this particular recommendation addresses indigenous youth, the principle behind the recommendation is equally relevant to applicants of all ages.

In January 2004 DESA appointed the Head of the Permanent Forum and started the recruitment of other secretariat officers. A large number of indigenous organizations – including several of the signatories to this intervention – wrote and reminded DESA of the understanding that special attention should be given to indigenous candidates when staffing the Permanent Forum Secretariat. Unfortunately, DESA did not follow the unanimous recommendations by indigenous organisations. In spite of the fact that there were qualified indigenous candidates to the positions announced, DESA chooses to ignore both the calls from the indigenous peoples and the general understanding held by both indigenous peoples and states. DESA's decision constitutes yet another example of a still lingering patronizing and discriminating attitude towards indigenous peoples, and is as such unacceptable to us. We are further concerned that this decision will set a precedent for future appointments to the Permanent Forum Secretariat.

It is more than time that the world community recognizes that indigenous persons are equal in capacity with non-indigenous persons, and that we are capable of managing our own affairs. We do not want to be victims of patronizing and discriminatory attitudes towards indigenous peoples in the UN system – particularly not in our own Permanent Forum. The Permanent Forum was established to promote the rights of indigenous peoples and to enhance indigenous input into the UN system. To ensure this, and to ensure that indigenous cultures and world-views are promoted by indigenous peoples themselves, we demand that in

future staffing of the Permanent Forum, priority is given to indigenous persons, if there are qualified candidates.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson.