

2008 04 24 / 123 / edward / item 7

#4

**United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues Seventh Session
New York, April 21 to May 2, 2008.**

**North America Indigenous Peoples Regional Statement
Item 7: Half-day discussion on indigenous languages**

Presented on behalf of the North America Regional Caucus by Grand Chief Edward John, North America Indigenous Caucus Co-Coordinator

Thank you Madame Chairman,

Today at this Forum we celebrate the historic adoption of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* by the United Nations General Assembly on September 13, 2007. We now move towards its full implementation.

This statement is an excerpt of the written report submitted by the North America Region Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 7th Session (UNPFII7) held February 22 – 23, 2008, Coast Salish Territory, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, attended by 49 representatives from 38 Indigenous Nations and organizations from North America (United States and Canada). The report in its entirety is available as Conference Room Paper (CRP) 4 in the official documents for this session [E/C.19/2008/CRP.4].

Addressing agenda item 7, "*Half-day discussion on indigenous languages*", the participants in this meeting from the North American region respectfully express the following to this session of the UNPFII:

Participants expressed profound concerns about the continuing threats to the survival of Indigenous languages in North America and around the world. These languages are essential components for the transmission of Indigenous culture, traditional knowledge, spirituality, natural world relationships and understandings and the basis of our identities as Peoples.

Participants recognized that a major factor in the dire situation of many languages and the threats to their survival in the US and Canada is the legacy of deliberate and planned government policies in both countries, including the forced removal of generations of children from their homes, families and communities, attempts at forced assimilation carried out by government agencies, churches, schools and other entities.

Participants strongly endorsed and commended the conclusions and recommendations from the UNPFII's Report of the International Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous Languages, January 8 – 10, 2008, Doc. No. E/C.19/2008/3. The participants called upon the UNPFII to ensure this issue remains on the agenda of future UNPFII sessions, specifically regarding how these recommendations can be implemented in North America and other regions.

Participants noted that the protection of Indigenous languages is strongly affirmed in article 14 and other articles of the *UN Declaration*. Participants called upon the UNPFII7 to urge States, including the United States and Canada, to implement these 19 provisions in conjunction with Indigenous Peoples and to invite them to present their progress and best practices in this regard to the UNPFII at its future sessions, in accordance with the *UN Declaration*.

Finally, participants noted with sadness and respect the recent passing of Elder and Chief Marie Smith Jones of the Eyak Nation in Alaska, who was the last fluent language speaker of her People. Chief Marie Smith Jones participated in past sessions of the UNPFII to address the crisis of disappearing Indigenous languages. Participants expressed sincere condolences to her family and Nation and consider that her passing is a strong signal to all Indigenous Peoples about the urgent need to make the protection and revitalization of our languages a central priority in our work.

In conclusion, threats to the survival of Indigenous languages affect all aspects of our lives. We strongly recommend that the UNPFII continues to ensure the issue of Indigenous languages remains a priority of future UNPFII sessions.

Thank you.