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By Shimin Gaikou Centre
(Citizen's Diplomatic Centre for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples)

Akiyo Inoko

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to update the latest situations of indigenous peoples in Japan.

First of all, we warmly welcome the active commitment of the Government of Japan for the implementation of Article 21 of UNDRIPs and paragraph 7 and 8 of the outcome document of the World Conference on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the national and regional level. Last week, on May 13, 2016, the Chief Cabinet Secretary of Japan, who is also a chairperson of the Council for Ainu Policy Promotion, mentioned that the government was going to take a sincere consideration to take measures including legislation to improve living standard of the Ainu people, and promote and advance education for Ainu children. We call upon the Government of Japan as well as local governments such as prefectural government of Hokkaido to ensure full and effective participation of the Ainu people during the decision making process of such measures.

Mr. Chair,

Active discussions have been taken place whether or not Ryukyuan/Okinawan peoples are indigenous peoples both at local and national levels. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Human Rights Committee have recommended the Government of Japan to recognize Ryukyuan peoples as indigenous peoples¹, due to active participation of the Ryukyuan NGOs at the United Nations for over twenty years. Some groups of extreme right-wing nationalists recently put pressure on the government that it should officially request those Treaty Bodies to withdraw their recommendations referring Ryukyuan peoples. Last month, April 27, 2016, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs agreed on such view and mentioned that the government will maintain

¹ For example, para.21, Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Concluding observations on the combined seventh to ninth periodic reports of Japan, CERD/C/JPN/CO/7-9 and para.26 Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Japan, CCPR/C/JPN/CO/6

its position not recognizing Ryukyuan peoples as indigenous peoples.

However, Mr. Chair, the Government of Japan has not given any concrete reason why the Ryukyuan peoples are not indigenous peoples². The Ryukyu Kingdom was an independent state before the annexation by Japan in 1879. It has signed treaties with the United States, France and Holland and had an equal status with other Asian countries. The Government of Japan has not clarified whether it annexed and colonized the kingdom. It is meaningless to discuss on this issue without verifying the history of the Ryukyuan peoples.

Therefore, we request the Government of Japan to establish an independent expert committee to verify how the Ryukyu Kingdom became a part of Japan and whether or not Ryukyuan peoples are indigenous peoples based on the accurate historical facts. In addition, we believe it is also significantly important to establish a similar committee to verify history of the Ainu people for reconciliation in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

² Government of Japan's response to the request dated March 9, 2012 of CERD, July 31, 2012 "While it is not clear exactly what kind of people the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) is referring to when it says "Ryukyuans/Okinawa, an ethnic group," "other Japanese residents of Okinawa," "the residents of Takae," "the people of Okinawa," and "the ethnic communities living in the area," the Government of Japan does not consider that there is a prevailing view in Japan that the people living in Okinawa prefecture or born in Okinawa have different biological and cultural characteristics from other Japanese citizens. Therefore, the Government of Japan understands that they could not be covered by "racial discrimination" as provided for in the Convention. Japan has repeatedly expressed this understanding in the process of past consideration of government reports for the Convention."