

Statement by International Labour Office

Working Group on Indigenous Populations  
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Mme Chair:

Congratulations on re-election.

The ILO has communicated to the Centre for Human Rights two sets of documents relevant to your discussions. The first, contained in E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.4/1990/2, relate to standard-setting, and I will not dwell on them here. They require no amplification and are, in any case, probably already out of date following your very laudable consultations last week.

The information to which I will refer now is contained in Addendum 1 to the above-mentioned document, and consists of three different subjects.

Supervision of Convention No. 107

The first, as usual, relates to the supervision of the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No. 107). I would recall that this Convention will remain in force for those countries which have ratified it but not ratified Convention No. 169 which revises it.

Information is supplied here on the comments by the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations concerning the implementation of C. 107 by Bangladesh, Brazil and India. You also have before you the report of the discussions in the ILO Conference this year on the same subject for Brazil and India.

As concerns Brazil, I would add to the information in these documents that, at the Government's request following the 1989 session of the ILO Conference, I myself went to that country and spent some time in the Indian areas in the northern part of the country. This included, among others, regions affected by the invasion of the garimpeiros, or illegal gold miners. The Government did not send the report due this year on the application of the Convention, but there was a further discussion of the case, as you see, both in the Committee of Experts' comments and in the Conference. The ILO has offered its technical assistance to the Government in attempting to resolve not only the immediate crisis of the damage being caused to the Indian peoples of this region, but also the social phenomena leading to the garimpeiro problem. This Working Group will be kept informed of any reply the Government may make to this offer, and of further developments in supervising the implementation of the Convention in this and other cases.

Next year reports are due from all 27 countries which have ratified Convention No. 107, so the report of the Committee of Experts should contain much more information on this subject than the limited selection available this year. We look forward, as in the past, to the collaboration of the United Nations and of the other specialised agencies in examining these reports.

Ratification of Convention No. 169

I am glad to be able to inform the Working Group that Convention No. 169 received its first ratification, by Norway, in June of this year. A second ratification will bring it into force, and there are a number of governments moving in this direction. We will keep you informed of further progress in this respect.

Resolution on ILO action

This resolution, adopted during the discussions leading to the adoption of Convention No. 169, has perhaps a slightly misleading title. It in fact goes beyond recommendations to the ILO alone, and encompasses also other international organisations. In application of the resolution, the ILO invited a number of other international organisations to attend a technical meeting, in May of this year, to discuss technical co-operation activities by the UN system, as concerns these peoples. This first meeting was purely a technical, consultative one. It was intended to inform each of the organisations of what the others are doing, and to open the way to co-operation and perhaps even joint activities. We are very grateful to the Centre for Human Rights for the active role played in the meeting, as well as to the other agencies which participated. We believe that this is a vital area for co-operation in the future, not only among the organisations themselves, but also between them and the indigenous and tribal peoples affected by these projects which the UN system calls development.

The ILO has been asked to continue to continue co-ordinating this effort, and we will keep you informed of further developments. The time will come, I hope, for an even more direct interaction between your standard-setting efforts and the technical assistance offered in this field.

I conclude, Mme Chair, by extending to you the assurance that the ILO will continue to co-operate with your efforts, and to seek the co-operation of the UN, in the future. A great deal remains to be done, both inside and outside the United Nations system.