

Permanent Mission of the Republic of Estonia to the United Nations organizations,
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United Nations
WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS
Fourteenth session
Item 6

CONSIDERATION OF A PERMANENT FORUM FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Statement on behalf of the Observer Delegation of the Republic of Estonia

Mrs. Maili Tootet

Thank you, Madame chairperson.

Although the indigenous issues have for many years been of interest and concern to Estonia, and Estonians have initiated or taken part in many of activities protecting and promoting the language and culture of indigenous people long before the International Decade was proclaimed, ^{although} we were also present during the technical meetings concerning the Decade, ~~but~~ it is actually the first time Estonia is participating as an Observer Delegation in the session of this Working Group. It is therefor a great honor for me to take floor and share with you our views .

The discussions over creating a permanent forum for indigenous people, as you all know, have been going on for many years. The discussions have concentrated on its possible composition, mandate and scope of powers.

The present Working Group reflects like a mirror the outlines of the possible forum. Many times, Madame Chairperson, you have had to remind to the participants that the working group is not a chamber of complaints. Right. But it shows clearly how badly a forum is needed, where indigenous peoples can speak up, and not only to speak up but to be sure, or at least hope, that it will lead to some relief to their complaints.

The compilation of extracts of declarations and programs of action pertaining to indigenous people from high-level United Nations Conferences, kindly put together by the Secretariat in document 5 of the present session, shows that governments have signed, starting with Rio in 1991 ^{and Copenhagen} and all through the recent HABITAT II in Istanbul, many excellent recommendations that need follow-up in order to be effective. One of the tasks of the possible forum could be to assure this follow-up.

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During this session we have heard innumerable heartbreaking stories, descriptions of injustice done and sufferings endured by the indigenous people in many parts of the world. All those who have told us about their sad experiences, are looking for help and advice. There have even been members of and representatives of indigenous communities to national parliaments, complaining about the laws of their country that do not sufficiently protect their people. This means that national parliaments, too, might need help of a high-level international forum in the process of elaborating national laws that take into account the concerns of the indigenous people.

Yesterday we all heard a young lady, speaking on behalf of the Indigenous Youth, and we remember our own spontaneous applause when she had finished. With her fresh and already so wise words she gave us a very positive impetus and much hope.

My Government is of opinion that there is a need for a permanent forum for indigenous people, and the consideration of this issue must be given a priority. May this Forum be established in the nearest future and may it become a forum that goes beyond playing words.

Thank you, Madame Chairperson.