

2008 04 30 / 266 earl / item 9 / pm

7th Session
UN PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES
NEW YORK, 21 April- 2 May, 2008

Statement by the Shubenacadie Band Council of the Mi'kmaq Nation

Agenda item 9: Future Work of the Permanent Forum

I want to express the sincere regards of the Chief and Council of the Shubenacadie Band to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

My name is Earl Sack, I am a Councillor of the Shubenacadie Band Council which is the government of the Shubenacadie Band of the Mi'kmaq First Nation. We are located in the Sikepne'katik District of Mi'kmaki, which is comprised of the lands of Atlantic Canada and parts of the State of Maine in the United States. Sikepne'katik is where our ancestors signed some of the earliest Treaties with the British Crown long before Confederation.

We are proud of our history, and though we have had continued recognition as a nation with the British then Canadian governments, we are well aware that our culture has evolved through time. Today we are a modern nation with aspirations to continue to participate in the global community as a distinct people.

I want to thank you, Madam Chairman, for giving me the opportunity to address the Permanent Forum today..

Over the past few years we have been engaged in several processes with the Government of Canada regarding recognition of our title and treaty rights to the lands and resources in our traditional territory. These rights have, in part, gained recognition through litigation such as the Supreme Court of Canada's decision on the Marshall case, however, for the most part we are involved in negotiations. These negotiations are most often based on governmental processes that have been rooted in national conceptions of "indigenous peoples". These processes are based on on-size-fits all policies and common approaches that do not take into consideration the specific culture, history and geography of the many First Nations in Canada. By using umbrella approaches in dealing with aboriginal issues at the national level the government reduces the specific issues of individual First Nations into a few common issues that can be more easily addressed by the government's bureaucracy.

Regrettably, the adoption of umbrella approaches to negotiations with aboriginal peoples advances the assimilation of individual First Nations' cultures into one "indigenous" culture. Shamefully, much is lost by this. Our local knowledge systems and traditional resource management systems are being eroded at a time when we must consider new approaches to address local and global environmental and resource management crises.

Homogenization of our individual cultures into a common indigenous identity within nation-states can only be prevented if we make every effort to assert our own identities within the global community. This will require diligence on our part as representatives from indigenous peoples to advance the principles and approaches set down so effectively within the UN Declaration on Indigenous Rights. We cannot depend upon the Nation-state governments to understand or respect our individual cultural, historical and social perspectives if we do not respect those of other indigenous nations. We must begin to work together as individual nations to advance the perception of indigenous people as nations within the global community. Only then can we prevent the loss of our individual identities through the processes that create homogenous indigenous identities.

By bringing many indigenous nations together, UNPFII has provided us all with an opportunity to better understand the commonalities of national governmental consultation processes.

It has also provided a very useful forum for the exchange of ideas between individual Indigenous nations on a bilateral basis. Often individual indigenous nations have more in common with their counterparts in other geographical regions of the world than in their own nation-state. The bilateral exchange of ideas and information between indigenous peoples can play an important part in building capacity within each indigenous nation which can enhance their ability to assert their identity and to enter consultations with national governments on an equitable basis.

Therefore, we respectfully recommend that the UNPFII enhance their role in facilitating bilateral exchange of ideas, information and experiences between the indigenous nations through interim meetings and symposia on key UNPFII agenda items. We further recommend that the UNPFII host these meetings in one of the cultural regions of the world so that local indigenous governments, communities, and organizations, which are unable to attend meetings at the UN Headquarters, can be represented. We suggest that the first round of meetings be held on mechanisms to ensure of Free Prior and Informed Consent within indigenous nations.