



STATEMENT AT THE SIXTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS, GENEVA, 1988

THE AINU ASSOCIATION OF HOKKAIDO

WGIP 88/EAS. JPN/1

Thank you very much, Madame Chair. We would like to express our congratulations on your election as chairperson. We appreciate the time and energy you have put into the work of this Working Group.

Madame Chair, other members of the Working Group, those representatives of indigenous nations and organizations as well as other NGOs, to all of you who have gathered here today, we would like to extend our deep respect and appreciation for making earnest efforts toward the solution of the problems we face, as these problems are drawing increasing attention throughout the world. We are from the Ainu Association of Hokkaido, which is the representative body of the Ainu people living in Japan. We would like to convey our solidarity with you in joining in these efforts.

Prayer (in the Ainu language):

Gods of the Heaven and Gods of the Earth,
Watch us the Ainu people and other indigenous peoples of the world. Give us the power to successfully make our wishes come true.

Madame Chair, I thank you for allowing me the time to speak.

Last year, our representatives participated for the first time in this Working Group on our own initiative, and were able, with your kind understanding, Madame Chair, to present the following points in our submission:

- (1) That in spite of the continuous assimilationist and protectionist policy of the Japanese government, the Ainu as a people are alive and well, and retain the right to self-determination as an indigenous people;
- (2) That our own culture, religion, language, and life customs are inviolable, and we as a people have the right to preserve and promote them; and
- (3) That we have the right to have a new "Ainu Act" enacted, which would replace the discriminatory legislation called the "Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act" and would recognize the Ainu as a people and guarantee their rights as an indigenous people.

It is, however, an unfortunate fact that the current policy being taken by the Japanese government is moving in a directly opposite direction to our hopes and wishes. It is Japan's position that the Ainu people have become an ethnic minority within the state of Japan. Moreover, the government's present welfare policy measures are an extension of the past unilateral assimilationist and protectionist policy that has existed since the beginning of the Meiji Era.

The Japanese government claims that in the course of the long history of Japan, a variety of ethnic groups were mixed into the Japanese nation and that the Ainu, as one of these ethnic groups, are not denied the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion or to use their own language on equal terms with the other Japanese under the Constitution of Japan. From this the government concludes that it neither claims Japan to be a mono-ethnic state nor denies the existence of the Ainu people -- "people" only in the plural sense of "person".

This attitude indeed places the Ainu in a position of a domestic ethnic minority. It evades completely the issue of the people's right

to self-determination, which is a collective right provided in Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and which is or should be one of the central concerns of this Working Group.

This attitude of the Japanese government also was expressed in the second periodic report submitted in December last year by the Japanese government for the review by the Committee on Human Rights. The government's judgement that we are not denied the enjoyment of the rights as Japanese nationals who are guaranteed equality under the Constitution is truly a dangerous one and is critical to our continued existence as a people. We believe that the Japanese government must make it clear to the international community when and how it "lawfully" acquired and established control over the mother earth of us indigenous people, Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and the Kuriles in the process of the building of the modern state of Japan. We urge the Japanese government to adopt a drastically new policy which is based on self-determination rather than the present assimilationist, protectionist policy and which specifies the responsibilities of the government. The government must also ratify the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Three generations back, almost all Ainu spoke their own language, but many of them have been forcefully deprived of their language. Unless the government makes serious efforts to stop the historical forces of assimilation that have accumulated over the past 120 years, it cannot claim that its policy has changed to that which respects Ainu identity and self-determination. Just to wait and see leads to ethnocide.

In the counter report to the second periodic report of the Japanese government, prepared by the Ainu Association of Hokkaido and contained in our material packet to be submitted to this Working Group, we raise six major points to be considered concerning the current conditions of

the Ainu people. We are not going to read them here in this room in the interest of saving time, but we request the members of the Working Group to read and give serious consideration to them and support the cause we are striving for.

Lastly, we learned at this Working Group last year about the weak financial position of the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations. In December, 1987, we urged the government of Japan to contribute to this Fund. We will continue our efforts in this regard, and we hope that the government will respond favorably.

Thank you very much.

Correction: Please read "Working Group of the United Nations on Aborigines" in our material packet as United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations.