



UNITED NATIONS WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

12TH SESSION

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ITEMS 8 AND 9:

STATEMENT BY THE NEW ZEALAND
GOVERNMENT OBSERVER DELEGATION

WGP94 GOV/OCE. NZL/2

Thank you Madame Chair

My delegation has read with interest the documents which have been circulated on the question of the role of the Working Group and the establishment of a Permanent Forum for indigenous peoples within the United Nations. We have been particularly interested to read your own comments, as well as those of Denmark and ATSIC, on the issue of the Permanent Forum.

Over the last two or three years the United Nations has begun to appreciate the contribution indigenous people can make to the consideration of global issues. I am thinking here in particular of the Earth Summit, but New Zealand hopes that due weight will also be given to indigenous issues in the forthcoming conferences on population and women, and at the Social Summit next year. This increasing awareness on the part of at least some Governments of the indigenous perspective on the global agenda makes consideration of the establishment of a Permanent Forum for indigenous peoples within the United Nations timely.

It is however clear from the documents before us, and the comments that have been made, that there is so far no consensus on the role indigenous people might play within the United Nations. As far as the establishment of a Permanent Forum is concerned, there are a number of key issues which are likely to take some time to resolve. These include the status and position of the Permanent Forum within the United Nations system, its mandate, and the role of Governments vis a vis indigenous representatives. The current financial difficulties of the UN are also a factor which cannot be ignored;

Governments, my own included, are reluctant to see additional expenditure at a time of financial stringency.

What this suggests to my delegation is that we need to consider some practical possibilities which can be implemented in the short term, while a consensus emerges on the question of a Permanent Forum. In this respect, as a first step my delegation would like to advocate a broadening of the membership of this Working Group to include indigenous representatives. These representatives could be appointed following consultation with indigenous people.

We make this suggestion conscious that it would be a first for the UN, but believe it would be very much in the spirit of the Working Group as it has evolved to date. The Working Group is already unique in the way it brings together Governments and indigenous representatives; it would be strengthened if indigenous representatives were to participate as members.

New Zealand sees this step as a measure we could implement quickly while indigenous and government representatives clarify the issues surrounding the establishment of a Permanent Forum. In our statement on this item last year we listed a number of other measures we consider the UN can take to ensure indigenous issues are given adequate attention in the UN system; we hope the Decade will ensure that these suggestions are taken up.