



COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Sub-commission on the Promotion and

Protection of Human Rights

Working Group on Indigenous Peoples

21-25 July 2003

Item 6(a) Cooperation with other United Nations bodies

Oral statement by Ms. Susie Jones, Walpole Island

Thank-you Mr. Chairman for the privilege of speaking at this important gathering. In my culture, we gather together periodically to see if "all is well" with our relations because we are a nomadic peoples. I am here to share with you that all is not well with the Indigenous Peoples living within the state of Canada.

The Education of Indigenous children in Canada was assumed by the Canadian government in the mid 1800's thru the residential school system. Children were sent to these schools in order to assimilate to the European culture. As a student in a residential school for 12 years I can say that this system was successful in assimilation, not in education. Our Chief Shingwauk believed that education was gaining knowledge which made one whole, spiritually, culturally, physically and mentally. This world view of education did not happen in the residential schools or in our schools today. We are shackled by governmental systems, curriculum and insufficient resources. Our territories and resources are taken by the state and used by the state with pennies sent our way.

I am appealing to the United Nations to safeguard the rights of our future generations of all our Nations. There is a need to safeguard the right of education as our right of self-determination envisioned by Chief Shingwauk. This requires the cooperation of all governments across the continents. The millions of dollars spent by state governments in education, social and economic programs could be better spent in providing a true form of education or by allowing Indigenous Peoples our right to self-determination to determine and provide our own form of education for our future generations as envisioned by our Chief.

Our Indigenous Nations and our identity as Peoples is maintained through language, our own system of government following our own laws, living within our family units, using our medicines, celebrating and practicing our own ceremonies to honour our creator and our lands. In the case of living within the state of Canada, the recent Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Final Report recognized the need for First Nations to maintain our own culture thru a true Indigenous initiative. The statement is true for all Indigenous Peoples living around the world. The right of the future generations is to know their own history, their own rights to self-determination which are rights to be upheld by the United Nations.

While my own community is emerging in the role of local governance, this is not true in all Indigenous communities. This is the key to maintaining one's own identity. Curriculum must be made relevant to each Nation. Adequate resources must be made available by all state governments.

On behalf of my Indigenous Nation I implore the United Nations Working Group members to help Indigenous Peoples by pushing the other bodies of the United Nations to recognize our right to self-determination as Peoples in our own homelands and territories. This can be done by assisting Indigenous Peoples to have a strong Declaration on our rights approved by the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly as soon as possible as our future generations are depending on us to act in order to have healthy future generations that follow the ways of our Creator and our laws.

Thank-you