

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination
and Protection of Minorities

Working Group on Indigenous Populations
Fifth Session, 3-7 August 1987

Item 5 of the Agenda

STATEMENT OF CHOCKIE COTTIER ON BEHALF OF THE
INDIGENOUS WORLD ASSOCIATION

A non-governmental organization in consultative status II with the
Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations

Thank you Madam Chairperson.

I am an administrator of an organization that develops social and economic programs for Indigenous families and communities. I am also the mother of four children and it is from my experience in these two worlds that I contribute to this discussion on self-determination.

I have read the numerous documents and listened to the interventions and I am very concerned. It appears that our discussions in the past ten years have become so technical that much of the human side of us has been left at the threshold of this building.

I have suffered the pains of discrimination and exploitation and struggle daily with families and children who are lost, caught in limbo with confused identities, lost culture and no purpose in life.

There is no purpose for them because they see no future in this world for Indian (Indigenous) people, as it is today. They don't know what to teach their children or even how to become a part of mainstream society.

As a mother I struggle to maintain a circle of spiritual strength and Indian values against what seems like a never ending battle to eliminate our people, if not by the gun, it is through the denial of our existence and through our forced assimilation into mainstream society.

From this, I would like to submit to you this list of principles for survival. I say survival because this represents the absolute minimum of standards that will be necessary to insure the continued existence of Indigenous Peoples as Indigenous Peoples on this earth, our mother.

What I call "survival" you may call "autonomy" or "self-determination."

Either of these terms ~~is~~ still less than the sovereign nation status that we should have as a right.

And so, I present to this body a Minimum Standard for the Survival of Indigenous Peoples.

- * The right to choose their own governmental processes.
- * The right to elect their own representatives.
- * The right to determine the means of the development of their own resources: human, land, water, air, space, mineral, agriculture, fishing, game, forests, off-shore, etc.

- * The right to develop and control their own educational systems, codes and curriculum.
- * The right to choose their own National and Regional languages, and when to use them.
- * The right to establish and control their own judicial structure, including enforcement and jurisdiction.
- * The right to define their own membership.
- * The right to a land base sufficient in size and resources to develop a diverse, healthy and culturally compatible economy, including the right to tax any resident, individual, or business.
- * The right to sufficient, uncontaminated water to live and support their populations in perpetuity.
- * The right to protect, preserve, practice and teach their children and their childrens' children their distinct languages, customs and spiritual practices, without interference or exploitation by any other group of people, in particular, the nation state in which their land is based.
- * The right to administer and design their own health care systems.
- * The right to choose whether or not it is in their best interest to participate in any and all forms of military conflict in accordance with their negotiated relationships with the nation state in which their land base is located.
- * The right to international representation in accordance with their negotiated relationships with the nation state in which their land base is located.
- * The right to unrestricted movement on their traditional land base, even where recently established borders have divided their territories.
- * The right to access current technologies at least to the level of the general population of the nation state and to adapt them to their own use.
- * The right to political representation at the National level as collective entities.

THE NATION STATE:

- * The national government should bear the responsibility to provide adequate technical assistance and financial support for health, education, welfare and economic development programs as a part of reparations for historical land theft and exploitation.
- * The national government should establish an independent office that would have the power to prosecute on behalf of the Indigenous people where the Indigenous peoples are and will continue to be a numerical minority.

In light of the historical exploitation of Indigenous peoples by nations and the inherent conflict of interest that may result in implementation of these principles, the Indigenous World Association fully supports the recommendations of the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues' recommendation to establish an International Ombudsman under the aegis of the United Nations to monitor Indigenous situations, and in particular, those that are in crisis.

In addition, the Indigenous World Association would like to reiterate our support of an official study of treaties and agreements made between Indigenous peoples and nation states.

Finally, we too support the proclamation of 1992 as "International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples."

Again, I call the aforementioned standards, minimum standards of survival and remind you of our continuing struggle to survive, and of the people who have died in the last ten years as you continue to contemplate this issue.

Thank you Madam Chairperson