



June 25, 2007

H.E. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa of Bahrain
President, United Nations General Assembly
United Nations
New York, New York 10017

Your Excellency,

We are writing in regard to the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. We understand that you have received a number of proposals concerning the Declaration. As international human rights organizations, we believe it is crucial that this long overdue human rights instrument be brought forward for final adoption as already adopted by the UN Human Rights Council.

The principles and provisions of the Declaration have been exhaustively debated within the UN system over the past two decades. The text adopted by the UN Human Rights Council on 29 June 2006 enjoys wide support among the states and Indigenous peoples' organizations that had actively participated in the UN Working Group tasked with its completion.

The danger that further negotiation of the text will lead to endless delays in its adoption is amply illustrated by the proposal that has been presented to your office on behalf of the African group of states. The African group proposal amends more than 30 provisions developed through years of careful deliberation in the Working Group and eventually adopted by the UNHRC. In addition, Canada is now calling for renegotiation of provisions that Canadian diplomats had actively promoted at the final Working Group session. We wish to state that we do not support any process that would re-open the text for amendments.

On 10 May, an alternative was proposed by Mexico on behalf of the co-sponsor group. In

this proposal, the text adopted by UNHRC would be preserved without further debate while legitimate state concerns would be accommodated through the language of the resolution itself. On 18 May, the international Indigenous Peoples' caucus supported such an approach in their statement to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples.

The Declaration does not create new rights, but sets minimum international human rights standards specific to the reality of Indigenous peoples. As a statement of common principles and aspirations, the adoption of the Declaration would mark an important step toward addressing the deep-rooted prejudice and discrimination that has led to widespread human rights violations against Indigenous peoples worldwide.

It is our considered opinion that the attention of the international community would be best directed toward upholding these principles, rather than injecting further compromises that erode Indigenous support, undermine the integrity of the Declaration, and derogate from international human rights law.

Our organizations welcome the appointment of Ambassador Davide Jr. of the Philippines to enable the current consultations to be brought to a timely conclusion. It is our hope that once these consultations are complete, it will be possible to proceed to final adoption of the Declaration as already adopted by the Human Rights Council. We respectfully urge you to support the proposal brought forward by Mexico, Norway, and other co-sponsors to enable adoption of this needed and long overdue human rights instrument before the end of the current session.

Respectfully submitted,

Amnesty International
Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)
International Service for Human Rights
International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs
KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives
Netherlands Centre for Indigenous Peoples
Rights & Democracy