

## **UN EXPERT URGES HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL TO ADOPT DRAFT DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

26 June 2006

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, today called on the members of the Human Rights Council, gathered at their first session in Geneva, to rapidly adopt a long-negotiated draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as a real proof of their commitment to the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples as expressed by the Heads of State in the 2005 World Summit.

The draft Declaration, which was produced almost twenty years ago by a subsidiary body of the now extinct Commission on Human Rights, has over the years received important inputs from Member States, indigenous peoples and human rights organizations. It expresses the aspirations of indigenous communities and underlines the specific rights and freedoms that must be recognized and respected so that indigenous peoples may overcome the discrimination and hardships that they have so long suffered in order to enjoy full equality as culturally distinct peoples with other sectors of national society.

Negotiations over the exact wording of the Declaration had floundered for some years over differences of opinion between various governments and indigenous peoples organizations, regarding the meaning of collective and individual rights and their application. The current text is an attempt to resolve these differences and represents serious efforts by all parties concerned to arrive at a mutually acceptable document.

In his opening speech to the Human Rights Council, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan urged the Council to adopt the Declaration. The Special Rapporteur is convinced that the time is ripe for the Declaration to be adopted by the new Human Rights Council, a decision that would be widely seen as a gesture of support for a new beginning in the effective promotion and protection of human rights. In response to the concerns of some States regarding issues of sovereignty and territorial integrity, the Special Rapporteur considers that no country has ever been diminished by supporting an international human rights instrument; rather the contrary is the case.

The adoption of the draft Declaration at the current session would signal not only to indigenous peoples but to all peoples of the world, that the Member States of the Human Rights Council share with them a comprehensive, positive and constructive view of human rights for the benefit of all.

The Special Rapporteur therefore welcomes the draft resolution of a number of Human Rights Council members for the adoption of the draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and hopes that the action taken by the Council will at last bring forth the long awaited Declaration.

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