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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
Sub-Commission on Prevention of  
Discrimination and Protection  
of Minorities  
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Agenda item 10

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST  
INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

Written statement submitted by the International Indian  
Treaty Council, a non-governmental organization in  
consultative status, category II

The International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) was founded in 1974 with the participation of 98 Indian nations and communities of the Western Hemisphere. It is in category II consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, and is a member of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations, and of the Committee of Non-Governmental Organizations on Human Rights (Geneva).

The International Indian Treaty Council recognizes the emerging negative trend in the world in terms of human rights violations and realizes the grave danger this trend poses for the already suffering Indian peoples of the Americas.

The geopolitical positioning of the Western Powers has given the green light to those régimes in the Americas which have, in recent years, been engaged in large-scale abuse of human rights. The group that is the single largest victim of human rights abuses in the Western Hemisphere is the American Indian nation.

Yet it seems as if a curtain of invisibility has been placed around the situation of Indian peoples of the Americas. As Mr. Van Boven so lucidly pointed out on Monday, "the majority of the world's indigenous peoples remain silent sufferers whose voices are rarely heard".

From the Conclusions of the Fourth Russell Tribunal on "The Rights of the Indians of the Americas" held in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, in November 1980, the observation was made:

"The program of cultural destruction and social oppression of the native peoples of the Americas did not cease when the several countries of the American continents declared their independence (nationhood). On the contrary, they simply assumed new forms. Since then, the machinery of internal colonialism has been continuously consolidated, ruthlessly seeking the disintegration of Indian communities. Now we are seeing an intensification of aggression led by governmental and local ruling groups, often dominated by transnational centers of power."

The devastating effects of colonialism and the denial of the enjoyment of human rights for Indian peoples of the Americas, including the denial of the right to self-determination, poor health and social conditions resulting from government policies and inequitable economies, the forcible transference of Indian children from their homes and communities to foreign environments, the partnership of policies between governments and religious missionaries intended to dislocate Indian societies and destroy Indian languages and cultures, the continued sterilization campaigns against Indian women and men aimed at impeding population growth of Indian peoples, whose populations were already decimated by several centuries of the most barbarous colonialism, the repression of Indian organizations, and the imprisonment, assassination, torture and kidnapping of Indian leaders are unmistakably clear in their genocidal and ethnocidal implications.

With the present rate of response from the international community, the future is indeed dark for the Red People of the Western Hemisphere. It is incomprehensible that the United Nations and all its bodies have somehow lost sight of the deplorable situation of the 80 million Indian people of the Americas.

The International Indian Treaty Council's constituency, the Indian peoples of the Western Hemisphere, have patiently awaited the Sub-Commission Study on Indigenous Peoples of the World. Although the inclusion of Indian people of the Americas within this category greatly dilutes the gravity of the particular situation of Indians of the Americas, even an early release of the Sub-Commission's report could have been a constructive step toward the development of a mechanism to monitor, debate, and make progress in the area of the enjoyment of human rights for the Indian peoples of the Americas. Now that the study is near completion, the International Indian Treaty Council firmly endorses Mr. Van Boven's call for moving quickly "from the stage of studying to the stage of action, bearing in mind that the plight of indigenous peoples is an acute one, and one which cannot afford the passage of much more time without appropriate action".

The International Indian Treaty Council calls upon the distinguished members of the Sub-Commission to consider the deteriorating situation of the human rights of Indian peoples of the Americas.

The International Indian Treaty Council recommends that the Sub-Commission take the following action:

1. Establish a continuing rapporteur on the indigenous question;
2. Establish a working group on indigenous peoples which would provide a system of fact-finding and regular reports;
3. Agree in principle on the necessity for a Declaration, and eventually, a Covenant, on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in the drafting of which indigenous organizations would participate.