

International Indian Treaty Council



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UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL RENEWS THE MANDATE AND CHANGES THE NAME OF UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Geneva Switzerland, September 30th, 2010

Today, September 30th, 2010, the 15th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) adopted without a vote a resolution to renew the mandate and change the name of the former “UN Rapporteur on the situation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Indigenous People”. This human rights mandate is currently held by Professor James Anaya, and will now be called “the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”. The US and Great Britain made statements explaining their votes, but joined the consensus to vote in favor. The Canadian government withdrew its objections after pressure was mobilized by Indigenous Nations in Canada.

The IITC and other Indigenous Peoples worked with the former Commission on Human Rights to establish this Rapporteur in 2001. We were informed at that time that it was not possible to use “Indigenous Peoples” in the title because this term had not yet been accepted by the UN system.

The Human Rights Council adopted the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous **Peoples** in 2006, and the UN General Assembly adopted it in September 2007, with only the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand voting in opposition. Since that time, Australia and New Zealand changed their positions and now support the Declaration. Earlier this year both the US and Canada announced that they are reviewing their positions.

It was therefore both surprising and disappointing to the Indigenous delegations attending the 15th HRC Session in Geneva this month when a small number of States, including at least two which had voted in favor of the Declaration, continued to object to using the term “Peoples” in the Rapporteur’s title as well as in other references in two resolutions under discussion addressing Indigenous Peoples’ human rights. Indigenous delegates, the governments of Mexico and Guatemala who took the lead on drafting these resolutions, and many other States insisted that the term “Peoples” be used as the accepted international language.

After several negotiating sessions which included both States and Indigenous Peoples’, the States opposing the term “Peoples” agreed to change their position. The 2nd resolution, also adopted today without a vote, addressed other areas of work on the rights of Indigenous Peoples including the UN Voluntary Fund, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the organization of half-day panel on Indigenous languages at the HRC next year.

IITC Executive Director Andrea Carmen, who headed IITC’s delegation at the 15th HRC session, commented that “it is an historic, if overdue, step for the UN’s main Human Rights body to decide to use the term “Indigenous Peoples” in the Rapporteur’s title. It has now been brought into line with existing international standards, in particular the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We appreciate the recognition and respect demonstrated by the Council for the advances Indigenous Peoples have made over the past 30 years of work in the UN system”.

The final texts of both resolutions (A/HRC/15/L.5 and A/HRC/15/L.6) will be available on the Web Page of the UN Human Rights Council: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/15session/>. For additional information, also contact the International Indian Treaty Council’s San Francisco or Alaska Offices.

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