

UNITED NATIONS  
WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS  
SIXTH SESSION, AUGUST 1988

GENEVA

EVOLUTION OF STANDARDS CONCERNING  
THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

STATEMENT BY THE OBSERVER DELEGATION OF CANADA  
DELIVERED BY MR. J.D. LIVERMORE,  
DIRECTOR, HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS DIVISION,  
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, OTTAWA

Madame Chairman,

Canada is pleased to take this opportunity today to comment on the standard-setting work of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and, in particular, its work towards universal draft principles in the area of indigenous rights. Our support for these activities is reflected not only in our participation in the sessions of this body but also in the careful consideration which Canada has afforded to the draft principles developed to date. We do not propose to repeat today the comments we have already submitted and which are available in working paper 2, addendum 1. We will also be submitting written comments in due course on the additional draft principles that have now been prepared, in the expectation that these and other comments can be taken into account over the course of the next year. Let me emphasize that the Canadian comments prepared to date are designed to stimulate thought and dialogue at a critical stage of a complex process.

We offer to you, Madame Chairman, our congratulations on completing a compilation of the many principles which have been the subject of discussions over the course of the past six years. With this draft text on the table, you move from conceptual discussion of difficult problems to the task of expressing in precise form appropriate international responses to these problems. We do not minimize the difficulties that lie ahead; but your text opens the way to translating our common commitment to aboriginal rights into effective action by the international community.

We understand that other texts and options have been the subject of informal consultations this week; and we are confident that the Working Group will be able to give thorough consideration to those contributions within the framework established by your working paper.

Madame Chairman, as many speakers have pointed out, this Working Group faces a daunting challenge. It must strive to obtain the highest possible standards of rights and obligations to protect especially vulnerable groups. But it must do so within an international system which has often resisted progress in the area of human rights, particularly with respect to implementation mechanisms.

Canada believes that one way of overcoming such resistance is to use existing international instruments as a foundation, building upon accepted language as circumstances require. Last year the Working Group was presented with two compilations of existing relevant instruments, and we expect that these will play an important role in facilitating your work at this and future sessions. Clearly, the aim of this exercise is not to depart from existing universal standards, but rather to determine the extent to which these rights need to be supplemented or elaborated in order to give effect to legitimate indigenous aspirations.

There are, of course, diverse views as to the extent to which such elaboration may be required. For our part, we intend to approach this question with an open mind and to give full consideration to the views of all other participants. We hope that others will give similar consideration to our views.

Let me close by thanking you again for a contribution of cardinal importance in the development of standards in the area of aboriginal rights.

Thank-you Madame Chairman.

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