



INTERNATIONAL INDIAN TREATY COUNCIL

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UN Commission on Human Rights Ends Today: The Fate of the UN Declaration on the Rights Indigenous Peoples Remains in Question

The International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) has serious questions about the future participation of Indigenous Non-Governmental Organizations ability to defend Indigenous Peoples Human Rights within the United Nations system. This uncertainty results from the creation of the new Human Rights Council. This restructuring also creates another significant delay in the United Nations' process for adoption of the UN Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Human Rights Council was formally created on March 15th by the UN General Assembly and will replace the UN Commission on Human Rights (CHR). The 62nd and final CHR session concluded its work today in Geneva with a short procedural session. Representatives of regional groups of states as well as NGO's read statements on the bodies' achievements and presented their views on the future work of the new Council. The new Human Rights Council is scheduled to begin its first session on June 19th of this year.

The UN CHR had been an important mechanism for the IITC and other Indigenous Peoples to address critical human rights violations and create global standards to defend and uphold these rights. It is unclear how Indigenous NGOs, like IITC, will be included in the new Human Rights Council. It is also unclear if NGO interventions on critical human rights issues, which were presented to the CHR 62nd session by IITC and other NGO's, will be addressed by the new Council.

A key concern for IITC and other Indigenous organizations is the continuing process towards adoption of the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration, mandated by the UN Economic and Social Council, has been in development for 25 years with participation from Indigenous Peoples around the globe. The declaration would have been addressed under CHR agenda item 15, "Indigenous Issues". Indigenous Peoples are still in the process of closely reviewing the CHR Chairman's text of the Draft Declaration to insure that it maintains the most essential rights as agreed to in the 1994 Sub-Commission text.

IITC and other Indigenous Peoples have stated clearly that the current changes in the UN structure must not diminish Indigenous Peoples' access or ability to defend their rights and redress violations by the member states. "The re-structuring of a UN system should not deny the IITC and other Indigenous NGOs access to the process, nor should the rights of Indigenous Peoples be put on hold by this process." said Andrea Carmen, executive director of International Indian Treaty Council. The current lack of participation and transparency awakens the question of when the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples will ever be recognized by the international community.