

69th UN General Assembly
Third Committee
October 20, 2014
Item 66, Rights of Indigenous Peoples
U.S. Statement
Delivered by Terri Robl, Deputy US Representative to ECOSOC

Thank you. Both the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) outcome document and the Secretary-General's report on the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples recognize the importance of supporting the principles and goals of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Doing so is essential to effecting tangible improvements to indigenous persons' lives and their ability to maintain their cultures, lands, and livelihoods. Both documents recommend that all stakeholders – notably member states, indigenous peoples, the UN, and non-governmental organizations – consult and cooperate on this effort.

In accordance with this recommendation as well as with Executive Order 13175, the U.S. government holds regular consultations with U.S. tribal leaders on policies affecting their members. During two additional State Department-hosted consultations for U.S. tribal and NGO participants in the lead-up to the World Conference, indigenous participants articulated several priorities for future UN action on indigenous peoples. The United States shares these priorities and is pleased to see them highlighted in the WCIP outcome document as areas for follow-up activity.

First, we must collectively develop more effective ways to prevent and address violence and discrimination against indigenous women and girls. To raise awareness about this topic, the United States delivered a joint statement on behalf of 35 countries at the June 2014 Human Rights Council session. The U.S. Ambassador to the HRC, a member of the Cherokee Nation, also spoke of his personal experience regarding the devastating consequences that violence against indigenous women and girls has on individuals, their families, and their communities, and his commitment to addressing this issue in the Council and throughout the UN system. The United States therefore welcomes the World Conference outcome document's suggestion that the Commission on the Status of Women examine empowering indigenous women.

Second, because the Declaration is key to advancing the status of indigenous peoples worldwide, the United States sees merit in having the UN monitor and assess member states' progress in achieving the objectives of the Declaration. We welcome specific proposals from member states, indigenous representatives, and the UN in this regard. The World Conference outcome document requests the Secretary-General to formulate recommendations on using existing UN mechanisms to this end, and we look forward to his suggestions. The possibility of modifying the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) for this purpose holds promise, and options for amending its mandate or revising its composition should be explored. We support the outcome document's invitation to the HRC to examine how EMRIP could be made better fit for this purpose.

Third, the existing arrangements for indigenous peoples' participation in the UN are not currently satisfactory. In addition to contributing to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII) and EMRIP, which were created especially for

indigenous peoples, indigenous representatives want to provide input to UN fora focused on development concerns, including issues involving employment, education, health, the environment, conservation, and cultural and intellectual property. Currently, indigenous organizations can participate in the PFII, but only accredited NGOs can take part in any other UN meetings open to civil society observers. The WCIP outcome document requests the Secretary-General to present proposals on enhancing indigenous peoples' participation at the UN, and the United States will provide its thoughts on this subject going forward.

Fourth, the United States looks forward to continued efforts with other member states to address repatriation of human remains and sacred or culturally significant objects.

We believe that the outcome document of the World Conference, coupled with the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda, paves the way for a reinvigorated approach to promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples and addressing their needs and concerns. Therefore, we do not agree with the recommendation contained in the Secretary-General's report A/69/271 that a third Decade should be established. While we agree with many of the recommendations in that report for recognizing and strengthening indigenous peoples' own forms of governance and ensuring their effective participation at the United Nations, we do not believe that a third decade would be the most productive route to attaining those goals.

Let me close by commenting on the theme of promoting reconciliation between governments and indigenous peoples. As part of our efforts to correct past injustices, the United States has resolved significant historical grievances concerning discrimination and the mismanagement of tribal trust funds, trust lands,

and resources such as water rights. The *Keepseagle* and *Cobell* Settlements were among the high-profile cases settled. These lawsuits have caused considerable contention between U.S. tribes and the U.S. government, and we now look forward to moving into a new era of partnership with indigenous peoples in the United States.

Thank you for your attention on this important agenda item. The United States looks forward to working with all stakeholders to build upon the achievements of the World Conference.