

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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United Nations: Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples long overdue

Amnesty International today urged all UN member states to adopt the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The draft Declaration will be considered by the UN General Assembly (Third Committee) soon. The organization calls in particular on Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the Russian Federation and the United States not to oppose this new important human rights instrument that was already adopted by an overwhelming majority in the UN Human Rights Council in June this year.

The Declaration fills an important gap. It addresses Indigenous Peoples' protection against discrimination and genocide. It reaffirms their right to maintain their unique cultural traditions and recognizes their right of self-determination, including secure access to lands and resources essential for their survival and welfare.

Adoption of the Declaration by the UN General Assembly is long overdue. UN treaty bodies have repeatedly affirmed state obligations to protect indigenous peoples, but the grave human rights violations they have experienced have continued unabated in every region of the world. Indigenous peoples are among the most marginalized and the most vulnerable.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the product of unique collaboration between states and indigenous peoples themselves. The result is a text that is grounded in existing rights protections but that also provides states with the necessary guidance on ensuring indigenous people's effective means to enjoy their rights, recognizing their distinct aspirations and their unique ways of life.

The Declaration provides a good framework for addressing the wrongs of the past and a vision of future collaboration and partnership between states and indigenous peoples on the basis of justice and respect for the rights of all. The General Assembly must seize this historic opportunity to adopt this text with the strongest possible support.

Background

It is estimated that 370 million people worldwide are identified as "indigenous peoples". The text of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was drafted by a working group of the former UN Commission on Human Rights with the participation of indigenous peoples' organizations. It was adopted at the first session of the new 47-member Human Rights Council -- which has replaced the Commission on Human Rights -- in June this year by a vote of 30 in favour, two against (Canada and the Russian Federation), with 11 abstentions and four states not participating in the votes.

