

- 2 -

Paragraphs 9 and 11 are supportive of the human rights objective of the year. For ten years, discussions have been ongoing to develop a body of standards on the specific rights of Indigenous People within the context of the universal rights of all humankind. Enough significant progress has been made to bring the findings of the experts forward for the consideration of governments. In this regard, we are particularly grateful for the enlightened approach taken by the working group on indigenous populations, under the most able and empathetic leadership of its chairperson, Mme. Erica Daes. We look forward to their report.

Mr. President, I now have a few words to say on behalf of the Government of Canada.

The resolution does not address all of the issues of concern to Indigenous People. I doubt that any single resolution could do so. But it does reflect the spirit of a new partnership. It opens doors of opportunity through which indigenous communities can progress freely towards their own cultural, social and economic goals without fear of assimilation and in harmony with the broader societies in which they live.

Never before in the history of all our nations has there been such a keen recognition of indigenous interests. The international labour organization's convention 169, and, more recently the UNCED conference, have given a central place to indigenous concerns. The work that Canadian aboriginal leaders, in partnership with our national representatives, were able to accomplish in Rio in bringing environmental concerns to the forefront are a source to pride to Canada. My colleague, the Honourable Jean Charest, Minister of the Environment, also recently appeared before this General Assembly to confirm Canada's continued commitment to the process set in train in Rio. It is also a spur that keeps us faithful to the commitment that we expressed there and continue to pursue on this critical world issue.

This has been a historic year for human rights and Indigenous People. A few weeks ago, I had the honour to meet Rigoberta Menchu, the 1992 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize -- the first indigenous person ever to be recognized for her work in support of human rights for Indigenous People.

Mr. President, for ten years, discussions have been under way to develop a body of standards on the specific rights of Indigenous People with the context of the universal rights of humankind. Significant progress has been made.

Some Indigenous People want discussions to continue at the expert sub-commission level in order to bring more governments to a better understanding of their aspirations. Many others feel that the time has come to move towards adopting a declaration that brings the principles under discussion into a body of internationally recognized rights and freedoms.