

## Commission on Human Rights

The 1998 Commission considered three issues relevant to indigenous peoples: (1) the question of a permanent UN forum for indigenous people; (2) the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People; and (3) a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

### Permanent UN forum for indigenous people

The second workshop on a permanent forum was held in Santiago from 30 June to 2 July 1997. The report of the workshop (E/CN.4/1998/11) contains information on: existing UN mechanisms, procedures and programmes concerning indigenous people; the mandate and terms of reference and activities that might be undertaken in the forum; membership and participation of indigenous people; and the UN body to which the proposed forum would report (including financial and secretariat implications). The workshop was attended by 25 governments, several UN bodies and agencies, some 30 organizations representing indigenous peoples, and three NGOs.

The review of existing mechanisms concluded that there are virtually no mechanisms within the UN system which give indigenous peoples an opportunity to take part in decision-making. Points made in discussion included, *inter alia*, that: there are no adequate procedures to ensure the full and effective involvement of indigenous peoples in the planning, implementation and evaluation of processes affecting them; there is a need to improve existing mechanisms as well as to give high priority to considering the establishment of a permanent forum; a permanent forum for indigenous people would contribute to better coordination, avoid duplication, strengthen cooperation and consistency of approach and ensure cost-effectiveness in UN programmes concerning indigenous peoples; there is a need to examine the relationship of a permanent forum to existing UN structures and mandates; the ongoing process of reform of the UN system should be taken into consideration when discussing the establishment of a permanent forum and, transparency and oversight are urgently needed, not only for reasons of efficiency and accountability, but also because indigenous people themselves are, in certain cases, becoming overwhelmed with meetings and information and are losing their capacity to participate fully and meaningfully in all of the international decisions which affect them.

The first addendum to the main report (E/CN.4/1998/11/Add.1) contains the text of a working paper presented by the government of Denmark, as well as the views of the Grand Council of the Crees and the Sammi Council, and the Declaration of the First International Indigenous Conference on a Permanent Forum in the United Nations System, held in Temuco, Chile, from 6 to 9 May 1997. The second addendum (E/CN.4/1998/11/Add.2) is the text of the contribution to the workshop by the Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission's Working Group on Indigenous Populations.

## International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

The Decade was proclaimed by the General Assembly in resolution 48/163 to begin on 10 December 1994. The proposed programme of activities for the Decade emphasized the role of international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people in such areas as human rights, the environment, development, education and health. In resolution 1997/32, the Commission on Human Rights recommended that the High Commissioner for Human Rights (HCHR) assume responsibility for coordination of the Decade and requested that a report on developments be submitted to the 1998 Commission.

The report of the HCHR (E/CN.4/1998/107) deals with activities undertaken for the Decade in the last three months of 1997. The report on activities in the first nine months of 1997 is contained in the Secretary-General's report to the 1997 General Assembly (A/52/509). The High Commissioner's report notes that the objectives of the Decade are: the adoption of the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples; the possible establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people within the UN system; and education as an important means to solve problems faced by indigenous people, as well as the promotion and protection of their human and historical rights.

The activities noted included: the meeting of the Working Group on a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples (October/November 1997); work related to the protection of the heritage of indigenous people, including a study of draft principles and guidelines elaborated by the Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission; organization of a workshop of indigenous journalists (see below); a workshop to discuss the implementation of article 8 (j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity in relation to indigenous people; and, the first meeting of the Advisory Group of the World Health Organization (WHO) on the indigenous peoples and substance use project, noting the project's aim is to prevent or minimize the risks of, and damage relating to, psychoactive substance use, mainly among indigenous communities.

Commentary on the Voluntary Fund for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People recalls that the Fund was established by General Assembly resolution 49/214 for the purpose of financing projects and programmes during the Decade. Between 1 January and 30 November 1997, the Voluntary Fund received contributions from: Canada, Denmark, Fiji, Greece, Japan, and Sweden, and from several non-governmental organizations. Through the Fund, a fellowship programme for indigenous peoples was established under which a number of representatives of indigenous organizations could spend six-months at the offices of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, receiving training and doing practical work on human rights and the UN system. The first group of fellows were in Geneva from June to December 1997. The Fund's Advisory Group recommended that the programme be continued