

Working Group on Indigenous Populations

United Nations

Geneva, July 30-August 4, 2006

Agenda Item 4b

Utilization of Indigenous People's land by non-indigenous groups or individuals for military purposes

Statement by Buffalo River Dene Nation

Dear Chairperson,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak. My name is Adelard Blackman, Special Emissary for Buffalo River Dene Nation in Northern Saskatchewan, Canada. I wish to make this statement on behalf of our Chief Louis Chinalquay and the people of Buffalo River Dene Nation.

Within our traditional territory we have what is known as the Primrose Lake Air Weapons Range, covering about 90,000 sq. km. In 1952, the Canadian government removed our people without free, prior and informed consent or proper consultation. This move has destroyed a way of life of our people that was not supposed to happen under the signing of Treaty No. 10 and other Treaties affected by this unilateral move of the government of Canada. It was understood by our people that this was a lease for 20 years and that we could return, needless to say, this has not happened.

It is no coincidence that the Canadian government so adamantly opposes the adoption of the Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. They believe that it will present a threat because of the power that will give to Indigenous Peoples, especially in the area of free, prior and informed consent as it applies to lands, territories and resources. However, they should realize that the Declaration simply recognizes the rights that we have always had as Indigenous Peoples, many of which were also recognized and affirmed, albeit in a different form, in the Treaties agreed to by the Indigenous Nations. These are only some of the reasons why the Canadian government opposes our rights as enunciated in the Declaration.

The Canadian government knew prior to 1952 that our territory is very rich in natural resources, which includes the world's largest oil sands deposit. At the time of removal of our people, the multinationals did not have the technology to extract the oil. Now, it is estimated that there will be over 100 billion dollars spent over the next 20 years [the estimated volume of oil reserves is over 1.6 trillion barrels, this is larger than the Saudi Arabia oil reserves] to feed the frenzy of the world for oil and gas.

It was a calculated move by the government and multinationals to gain control of our traditional territory and natural resources contained in it. Now, they are making moves to increase the exploitation of the oil, gas, forest, diamonds, uranium and water. Furthermore, the government is attempting to put a nuclear waste disposal site within our territory without any consultation with our people.

Although this was initially done under the guise of the common good of all Canadians, of the territory confiscated by the government, only 1% is still used for military purposes. The effect that all of this has caused on Cold Lake First Nations and other reserves surrounding the Weapons Range including Buffalo River Dene Nation, is devastating. It has destroyed our people and a way of life and it presents serious threats to our well-being.

Today, we are here to inform the Working Group on Indigenous Populations that we, the Buffalo River Dene Nation, will no longer tolerate these actions taken by the government and multinationals. As of October 17, 2005, we have retaken back control of our traditional territory and natural resources. This is an unprecedented move against the Canadian government, the military and the multinationals. No development will be allowed until Buffalo River Dene Nation decides how and when this will happen, if at all. We will protect our way of life, our people, and our traditional territory by any means necessary.

We are asking the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, the Permanent Forum, and all Indigenous Peoples of the world to monitor, investigate and document our struggle and the situation that we are in. We know there will be a backlash and retaliation by the government because of the moves that we are making, including taking the Canadian government to the International Court of Justice in September 2007 for Human Rights violations.

In closing Chairperson, we are in support of the continuation of the mandate of this Working Group on Indigenous Populations because it is clear to us that we will never receive justice in our domestic courts. One of the future and ongoing mandates of this Working Group is, and should continue to be, the establishment of an International independent Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanism for Indigenous Peoples such as ourselves who cannot find just recourse within our country situation. This can be done either by the establishment of an independent international tribunal for Indigenous Peoples or by the re-mandating of existing bodies such as the International Court of Justice or similar regional mechanisms.

For further information, please go to; <http://brdnngo.googlepages.com/>