

**FIRST SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
GENEVA 19 – 30 JUNE 2006.**

AFRICAN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES CAUCUS STATEMENT

We, the African Indigenous Peoples Caucus, have come in hope to this historic first session of the Human Rights Council. Our hope rests on the vision of the African diplomatic caucus set out in Swaziland in 2005 on how Africa wishes to see the restructuring of the UN. A vision that is in line with that of the Secretary-General that Human Rights, Peace and Security and Development are equal legs of the three-legged pot of human progress.

Our hope is that this august body, in its first session, will adopt the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples a universal standard setting, non-binding instrument that will demonstrate to the world a break from the discredited past.

We urge African countries not to allow states, who have twice voted against the Declaration on the Right to Development and have also voted against the Durban Declaration on Racism, to derail the continent from its own progress on this issue as embodied in the resolutions of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights. These countries now want Africa to support them against the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a double standard which is unacceptable.

We draw the attention of this body to the fact that several African countries, inspired by the First Decade on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the effective, principled and peaceful mobilization by African Indigenous Peoples organizations, have adopted important domestic legislation, protocols and policies to protect and promote the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Morocco and Algeria have recognized the Amazigh culture, language and identity and have created institutions for the integration of the Amazigh language and culture in the educational system.

Burundi has included the protection of political rights for the Batwa Peoples in its 2005 Constitution that was passed by a referendum. Similarly, the Congo has recognized the Batwa Peoples.

South Africa has established an inter-departmental working group, an advisory structure for the Cabinet and relevant ministries on Khoe and San issues, while its constitution protects and promotes language and cultural rights of the Khoe and San peoples. Both Gabon and Cameroon have adopted the United Nations Environmental Programme Operational Directive 4.1 on Indigenous Peoples.

And finally, the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights adopted a resolution in 2003 to recognize and promote the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Africa. Indigenous Peoples issues feature as a permanent agenda item on the African Commission.

We urge the Human Rights Council **to adopt** the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and **to support the resolution proposed by Peru and their co-sponsors** in this session.

We appeal to the members of the Human Rights Council **not to vote in favour of any amendment** that will delay the adoption of the Declaration so that in the words of the Secretary-General Kofi Anan the Human Rights Council should adopt the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples so that it starts its work with a tangible achievement.