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HUMAN RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Written statement submitted by North-South XXI, a non-governmental
organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement,
which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council
resolution 1996/31.

[11 July 1998]

1. Indigenous peoples must be able to enjoy all the human rights in force. This is the principle behind the statements made in the various United Nations committees entrusted with the task of monitoring the implementation of human rights agreements.

2. However, the Amerindian peoples of North, Central and South America are still being subjected to discriminatory treatment.

3. In most of the States of Central and South America, discrimination is direct, but sometimes, as in Chiapas, it is accompanied by violent repression. Attempts are being made to eliminate physically active militants and representatives of the Amerindian peoples (for example, E. Morales in Bolivia). Their rights to national identity, development, access to education and to health care are flouted. The Amerindians are in exile in their own territory.

4. In North America, and particularly in the United States, direct elimination is sometimes used (as in the case of the leader, Leonard Peltier, imprisoned for nearly 20 years and in danger of dying in prison for lack of adequate care). More often it is a matter of organizing the corruption of the Amerindian communities, as through the sharing by certain tribes in the profits of casinos and gambling saloons in California. Most of the tribes in the United States have record levels of poverty, alcoholism and suicide. Linguistic assimilation has encouraged the virtual extinction of numerous Amerindian languages in the American-style "super-democracy".

5. In these circumstances, the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples must quickly become a new instrument for the protection of human rights, despite the constant delays on the part of some Powers in North and South America.

6. This declaration must ultimately be adopted, despite its imperfections. It has the merit of recalling that indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination and of enshrining the right of indigenous peoples to maintain the "distinctive and profound relationship" established with nature and with their land in particular. It is thus envisaged that limits must be placed on the claims of transnational companies to Amerindian land, in violation of the treaties concluded, for the purpose of extracting underground resources (oil, water, etc.) and undertaking speculative operations.

7. The Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities must commit itself to supporting the pan-Amerindian coordination efforts that are needed for a real Amerindian renaissance; it must call for the speedy adoption of the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.
