

UN World Conference on Indigenous Peoples

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Roundtable 1: UN system action to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

September 22, 2014

I am the Lieutenant Governor of the Chickasaw Nation – an Indian nation with our own government that has entered into treaties and that historically has been a part of the international community. We are back now, along with many other indigenous nations, to take our places here. We are indigenous nations and peoples – not just individuals. As nations, with our own governments, we are rejoining the international community. I am speaking now on behalf of more than 130 Indian nations and communities in North, Central, and South America, and many indigenous organizations. There are many, many other indigenous nations like my own in many parts of the world.

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is an historic statement of our rights intended to guard against the genocide, the theft of lands and resources, the discrimination, and the political exclusion that Indian nations and many other indigenous peoples have suffered – and too often continue to suffer today.

But this Declaration will not achieve its purposes without concrete actions on the part of the UN. Specifically, there must be lasting, effective institutions to monitor and encourage compliance with and implementation of the rights in the Declaration. There must be a permanent, on-going body in the United Nations that will do this work in future years.

We intend to see that an effective mechanism is developed in the UN to implement and monitor compliance with the Declaration. We will help to carry out the commitment to review and modify an existing UN mechanism to make it an effective body capable of monitoring and implementing the Declaration. Such a body must have the support and involvement of states as well as indigenous peoples. We, as indigenous nations must commit ourselves to collaborate with states, with the UN Human Rights Council, and with other UN bodies to develop such an implementing and monitoring body soon.

There is another essential means of implementation. The best way to implement the Declaration and safeguard our rights is for indigenous nations and peoples, represented by their own governments, to be able to participate fully and permanently in the work the UN. Taking the steps called for in the Conference outcome document to enable and ensure participation by indigenous governments will mean that representative indigenous voices will always be here in the UN to call for respect for our rights, to address issues that concern us, and to work with member states to improve the lives of all people of the world. We as indigenous governments must be here, in the UN, -- and this will be the most effective way to deal with new conditions in future years and to actually achieve the purposes of the Declaration.

During the preparatory process for this conference, we had the opportunity to meet with many UN member states to discuss these two necessary mechanisms for ensuring implementation of the UN DRIP. We have been heartened that many expressed their support for the creation of both a UN body to monitor implementation and a process for regularizing indigenous government participation at the UN.

We, as Indian and other indigenous nations, intend to work hard along with all of you to see that the historic commitments made at this World Conference are brought to reality as soon as possible.

Thank for the opportunity to make these observations.