



Press release

Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East (RAIPON) International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA)

Geneva, February 5, 2009

UPR, review of the Russian Federation

The Russian Federation National report to the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review (UPR) fails to make any mention of the indigenous small numbered peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East, thereby ignoring the concluding observations of the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which, as recently as September 2008 called on the Russian Government to address several pressing human rights issues, such as land rights, access to adequate food, political rights and involuntary resettlement. The failure to even mention its Indigenous Peoples Human Rights issues in the context of the UPR is in and of itself discrimination towards them.

RAIPON, the umbrella organization of indigenous peoples in Russia considers that the Russian Federal Government has failed to conduct an adequate and broad national consultation process as required under the UPR.

Indigenous peoples' rights are guaranteed in the Constitution of Russia as well as in three federal laws. The laws however are not implemented and the Russian government seems to have no intention to develop adequate implementation mechanisms.

Violations of the rights of indigenous peoples in Russia are widespread resulting from a combination of factors:

- An inadequate and contradictory legal and policy framework that affords no protection for their land, livelihood and consultation rights.
- An increasingly inadequate provision of social services, due to the termination of health and education facilities in many small and remote settlements, leading to misery in those rural areas.
- And the launching of programmes that result in forced displacement of indigenous communities and destruction of the natural resource base upon which they rely for their subsistence and cultural practices.

The CERD recommendations include immediate action with regards to the deterioration of legal safeguards of indigenous peoples' basic human rights and steps to guarantee their full and

immediate access to and legal title over the land which they have inhabited since time immemorial.

It further recommends that the Russian Federation take steps to ensure that industrial exploitation of indigenous territories does not go ahead without the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of indigenous communities affected.

It mentions the minimization of and compensation for damage to indigenous lands and the withdrawal of support for projects, which lead to involuntary resettlement, such as the Evenkiiskaia hydroelectric dam.

During the interactive dialogue of the UPR, Russia clearly stated that it will develop a plan for the implementation of the CERD committee's recommendations and that it will present a report by the end of 2009.

The indigenous small-numbered people of the North, Siberia and the Russian Far East comprise of 40 ethnic groups inhabiting large territories in the Northern and Asian parts of the Russian Federation. Together, they number approximately 250,000 individuals. Their traditional ways of live are based on subsistence activities such as hunting, reindeer husbandry, gathering and fur-hunting. Among the many ethnic groups of the Russian Federation, they are among the most vulnerable to discrimination, due to their low economic status, the extreme remoteness of their territories and their limited political influence. Their life expectancy is 10-20 years below average in Russia and unemployment 4-5 times above average. Due to these circumstances and to a lack of protection of their rights, some indigenous peoples are close to extinction.

Their original traditional territories stretch from the Kola Peninsula in the West to Chukotka on the Pacific coast, covering approximately two thirds of the territory of the Russian Federation. It is from these territories that the bulk of Russia's wealth in natural resources, such as oil, natural gas, coal, gold, diamonds and timber is being extracted and the indigenous communities are increasingly feeling the negative impacts resulting from the encroachment of national and international extractive corporations into their remaining territories.

To ensure indigenous peoples human rights, especially their right to adequate standard of living, to culture and to food, indigenous peoples' rights need to be protected. Protection is most urgently needed vis-à-vis large corporations, exploiting subsurface resources on indigenous communities.

Indigenous peoples organizations and Human Rights Groups are calling on Russia to take the recommendations from the UPR and the CERD committee seriously, and to hold on to the commitment made this week of their implementation.

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