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A N T H R O P O L O G I C A L
A S S O C I A T I O N

June 11, 2007

H.E. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly
United Nations
New York, NY 10017

Madam President:

On behalf of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), at present the largest professional organization of anthropologists in the world and composing 12,000 members, we wish to express our grave concern for the status of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in the ongoing effort to have it approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Given the detrimental historical treatment received by indigenous peoples under the various guises of manifest destiny, assimilation, and colonialism, given an evident tendency to exclude representatives of indigenous peoples from processes of decision-making directly affecting them, and given the fact that indigenous peoples have suffered calamitous, and even genocidal, effects, *because of their status as indigenous*, there is clearly a need for a distinct human rights instrument that provides indigenous peoples with the means to assert their own priorities, in cooperation with states, at the international level.

As you know, the process of creating this non-binding Declaration, meant to more clearly enshrine indigenous peoples' rights in international law, has been an exceptionally long one of twenty-four years. During this process indigenous representatives have patiently worked with UN member states to create a balanced and equitable statement recognizing indigenous peoples as distinct, articulating their right to self-determination, to their lands and other resources, and to the exercise of "free, prior and informed consent" in matters affecting their welfare, but while not also dismissing their responsibilities to the states in which they live. The AAA has supported this process.

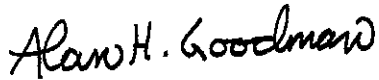
As reported by Ellen Lutz, director of Cultural Survival (an organization founded by an anthropologist) and a member of the AAA Committee for Human Rights, the alternative text of the Declaration submitted for consideration by the "African Group" fundamentally compromises the basic purpose of this Declaration and removes any reference to the self-determination of indigenous peoples, in contrast to the version adopted by the Human Rights Council. As recently stated in the *Anthropology News*, the association's official

newspaper, The AAA understands the rights articulated in this previous version to be “a minimum standard for the survival and well-being of the world’s indigenous peoples.”

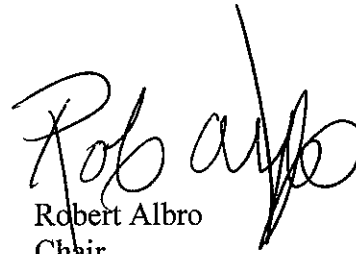
As a discipline with a long history of documenting the irresponsible behavior of states toward indigenous peoples, as an organization that enjoys consultative status at the United Nations and a working relationship with the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and given the fact that anthropologists have been actively engaged in this process as researchers, civil society representatives, colleagues, and advocates for making the Declaration a reality, the AAA wishes to express its dismay regarding any efforts to undermine this long-overdue outcome.

For this reason, we urge you to take action to insure that the revised text not supplant the existing text, which has been painstakingly worked out over years, in good faith, and with the best interests both of indigenous peoples and of states in view. Thank you for your attention.

Respectfully,



Alan H. Goodman
President
American Anthropological Association



Robert Albro
Chair
AAA Committee for Human Rights