



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES INDIGENOUS VOICES

BACKGROUND

Indigenous Peoples in Central and Eastern Europe, the Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia

Eleventh session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Discussion on Friday, 11 May 2012, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

The situation of indigenous peoples in Central and Eastern Europe, the Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia will be the focus of a half-day discussion during the eleventh session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Indigenous peoples in the region continue to face multiple challenges related to the full enjoyment of their human rights and land rights, their political participation, and socio-economic issues, including gaps in education, literacy levels and life expectancy.

In the Russian Federation, indigenous communities traditionally inhabit scarcely populated areas, where harsh climate and lack of easy transportation or communication create conditions of isolation and present unique obstacles to the indigenous peoples' social, political and economic participation in the larger society.


Russian federal legislation protects the “small-numbered indigenous peoples of Russia,” defined as those who live in territories traditionally inhabited by their ancestors; maintain a traditional way of life and economic activity; number fewer than 50,000; and identify themselves as separate ethnic communities.¹ The official listing of the small-numbered indigenous peoples of the Russian Federation identifies 46 such groups, comprising in total 244,000 people who reside mainly in the North, Siberia and the Far East of Russia.

Indigenous peoples are protected by Article 69 of the Russian Constitution and three specific federal laws, which establish the cultural, territorial and political rights of indigenous peoples and their communities, such as both group and individual rights to free-of-charge use of land and renewable natural resources; the rights to establish self-government bodies in

¹ A/HRC/15/37/Add.5 *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on the Situation of indigenous peoples in the Russian Federation* (2010)



United Nations



places of compact settlement and to form communities and other organizations; the right to reform their educational institutions according to their traditional way of life; and the right to receive compensation for damage to their traditional environment due to industrial activities.

While some challenges still remain in the effective implementation of the substantial guarantees set out in these federal laws, there are some good practices where indigenous peoples' rights have been enhanced. The law "On Territories" specifically provides that where designated traditional territories are established, oil and other industrial development may occur only after consultation and agreement with the indigenous communities living there. This requirement has given rise to several instances of cooperation between oil companies and indigenous people.

The Permanent Forum is expected to adopt recommendations at the conclusion of the discussion, including the main issues, challenges and positive measures of cooperation to improve the situation of indigenous peoples in Central and Eastern Europe, the Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia – together constituting one of the seven regions represented in the Permanent Forum (the others being Africa; Asia; Central and South America and the Caribbean; the Arctic; North America; and the Pacific).

Journalists without United Nations press accreditation, please refer to the website of the Media and Accreditation Liaison Unit for details:

<http://www.un.org/en/media/accreditation> or call +1 212-963-6934 or 212-963-6937

For media queries, including interviews with United Nations officials and indigenous representatives, please contact Ms. Martina Volpe Donlon, tel: +1 212-963-6816 or email: donlon@un.org – United Nations Department of Public Information

To contact the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, please get in touch with Ms. Nilla Bernardi, tel: +1 212-963-8379 or email: bernardi@un.org – UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs

For more information on the eleventh session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, please see: <http://social.un.org/index/IndigenousPeoples.aspx>