Committee: The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)

Topic: Guiding Principles for the Implementation of Indigenous Peoples' Rights to Autonomy and Self-Government

Country: Japan (Ryukyuan)

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Indigenous people claim and manage 50 percent of the world's land, yet only legally own 10 percent of it (Extraction Operations). For generations, indigenous people have prioritized a relationship with nature. Although they comprise less than five percent of the population, they protect 80 percent of Earth's global biodiversity (Extraction Operations). By following this example on a broader scale, we can preserve more of Earth's biodiversity.

Indigenous peoples' priority with nature has not stopped companies from performing extraction projects on their land. Many states and countries have legally established the rights of indigenous peoples' territorial autonomy. However, many of these rights have been undermined through land dispossession through extractive projects. In most countries, important rights to self-governance must still be addressed (IWGIA).

Cultural and linguistic contributions should also be acknowledged. A large amount of scientific evidence shows that indigenous languages that are deeply rooted in oral traditions may offer indications of historical events that happened over thousands of years ago. By promoting these languages, we are preserving and promoting some of indigenous heritage and identity. We must also ensure that they can participate and benefit from the UN's work (Extraction Operations).

Because of the role indigenous people play in protecting biodiversity and historical knowledge, the Ryukyuans urge for indigenous people's right to autonomy and self-governance. The United Nations has worked with States to include more indigenous education, advanced indigenous rights in the UN Human Rights Office by carrying out a range of activities, and developed autonomous Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) protocols. There is still work to be done to ensure autonomy and self-governance. This can be done by setting up educational programs for indigenous languages, creating an organization of indigenous community leaders, and including more indigenous education into schools.

Ryukyu is an archipelago in the East China Sea and is where the Ryukyuans live. They share cultural elements with Japan, but have developed their own political and cultural traditions. Ryukyu's disconnection with Japan comes mostly from historical events, including Japanese militaries invading Ryukyu, continued by the banning of several Ryukyuan languages. This led to things such as loss of tradition, land, and resources (Minority Rights).

As Japan continues to leave Ryukyuan rights unrecognized, little actions have been undertaken by the Ryukyuans themselves, but some policies have been adopted by the broader community. Started by indigenous peoples themselves, the FPIC protocols have been important in setting

autonomous laws. These laws are a big step in providing culturally appropriate rules for indigenous peoples' rights (IWGIA). The UN Human Rights Office was developed to carry out a range of country-specific and regional activities to advance indigenous rights. Some of these activities include promoting national-level legislative change, which is the amending or creating of new laws, delivering legal analysis and related policies and legislation, coordinating a programme for young indigenous peoples with four language options, supporting the United Nations Voluntary Fund for indigenous peoples, and facilitating dialogue and cooperation with several actors as well as State authorities(OHCHR).

There are some other solutions that can be proposed. One of them includes creating popular educational programs on indigenous languages for all ages. This would encourage a wider audience of people to learn more about native languages, and spread overall awareness of indigenous rights. The UN could be responsible for overseeing the development and creation of these programs. Funding options for this could be received from just the UN or donations from philanthropists. To confirm this solution is working, a branch of the UN could be responsible to check in with programs to see the flow of students and lessons.

A second solution would be to create an organization of indigenous community leaders. A strong organization could raise awareness for their cause, help with funding, fight for their rights and land, etc. This would be a new non-governmental organization created. The UN could help fund this new organization.

The third solution is to include more indigenous education into schools. This could be achieved through lessons, field trips, indigenous representatives, projects, and more. Principals and teachers can get together to discuss the application of these experiences. Applying more indigenous work into schools can raise awareness of their culture. Governments can be responsible for including this education into public schools. Funding can be achieved through more philanthropist donations. Governments could monitor nearby school districts for the placement of this kind of education.

Although work is being done to improve indigenous self-governance including the FPIC policies, the UN Human Rights Office, and UN declarations such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), Ryukyu once again encourages raising and spreading awareness on autonomy and self-governance by creating language programs, developing an NGO to organize and support indigenous community leaders, and implementing indigenous education into schools.

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