

Name of country: Federal Republic of Germany

Delegates: Honorable A.C., D.M., and M.K.

Committee: General Assembly

Topic: Rights of indigenous people, especially women and children in Latin America

“We are not myths of the past, ruins in the jungle, or zoos,” said Rigoberta Menchú, an indigenous Guatemalan. “We are people and we want to be respected, not to be victims of intolerance and racism.” For centuries, indigenous people have been enslaved, tortured, and killed. Their identity, culture, land and fundamental rights have been taken from them. They have not been allowed to participate in politics and decisions concerning them. They have not had access to education, health care, or protection. Even in today’s society, indigenous people continue to be victims and will continue to be victimized unless something is done.

There are 300-500 million indigenous people worldwide. They occupy 20% of the earth’s land surface, and live in nearly every country. Some countries have more indigenous people than others, for example 45% of Peru’s population is indigenous, while only 1% of Costa Ricans are indigenous. The indigenous people of the world want to protect their language, land, and culture. They believe that what they need are new international documents that address specific needs of indigenous people, because as of now their rights do not have specific safeguards.

Their access to proper education is poor and when it is available, it is frequently in another language. One indigenous person who spoke quiché, a Mayan language, had to learn Spanish in school because of the lack of bilingual education. None of the teachers spoke her language and she had to repeat first grade. Part of the reason for indigenous people not having education is that many of them live in isolation, which makes it harder to have access to education. Others avoid going to school because of discrimination and abuse. In Sub-Saharan Africa, only 13% of indigenous people have access to education in their own language. Indigenous people often have no education at all: Nepal’s indigenous population has a 10% adult literacy rate, in contrast to 40% for the rest of the population. In Namibia the gap is even greater: 20% of indigenous adults are literate and 95% of non-indigenous adults are literate!

Indigenous women are threatened by many things, including poverty, no health care, no education, armed conflicts, unsympathetic governments, and loss of land. They are paid less, if they have jobs at all, and are subject to discrimination and abuse. The illiteracy rate for indigenous women is even higher than for men. In some parts of Cambodia, 20% of men are literate and only 2% of women!

Several programs and treaties have been put into place to assist the indigenous communities. The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People addresses the individual and collective rights of indigenous people. The declaration states that indigenous people have the same rights that other people do, especially rights to culture, language and identity. It declares

that indigenous people, whose rights are violated, are entitled to redress. Not all countries follow these guidelines however. Canada for instance has a policy to wipe out indigenous cultures and languages in schools, and the Canadian indigenous people do not receive adequate redress. Indigenous people have the right to be free from discrimination based on their indigenous origin or identity. Yet many indigenous people are discriminated against at work and in schools, in spite of their rights to employment and education, and to be free from discrimination.

Germany agrees with the rights and ideas expressed in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, and voted in its favor. However, it did not ratify the Convention because the statement about rights to land would interfere with their work and the work of other international private companies operating in areas inhabited by indigenous people. The German government adopted a strategy paper in 2006 called "Development Cooperation with Indigenous Peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean." It aims to assist indigenous people in exercising and declaring their right to self-determined development. It is a guideline for German government implementing organizations in Latin American operations. This approach strengthens and supports indigenous people and their organizations. Respect for indigenous people, as well as their rights and needs, is important in German development cooperation activities going on in Latin America.

In the last 4 years, German development cooperation has changed its programs to respect more the rights and needs of indigenous people, especially in Latin America. Germany supports the Development Fund for Indigenous Peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean in creating the network of the Indigenous Intercultural Universities. The purpose of this plan is to train people for indigenous organizations and Latin American governments on intercultural and indigenous issues. Also, in Germany's national Gender Action Plan, it expresses special concern for gender equality and women's empowerment as a principle of project and program design in Germany's development policy. This also concerns cooperation with indigenous people in Latin America. Germany is working on a new program to prevent violence against Latin American women, which will help non-governmental and government organizations to improve protection of rural women against domestic and other violence.

Global Vision International (GVI), an NGO that sends participants to aid-reliant projects worldwide, has a program on education projects for indigenous children in Guatemala, typically ages 5-12. The program focuses on basic education and literacy projects. In Guatemala, education is not free and most of the population is below the poverty line, so GVI has built schools that are free to attend. Over 400 children currently attend these schools. Of those, nearly 50 children entered secondary school and 8 entered college. In order to begin helping indigenous people all over the world we must adopt the Rights of Indigenous Groups plan. To provide education for indigenous people who live in isolation, we should build schools in areas inhabited by them. These schools need to have bilingual and bicultural education, so that indigenous people can communicate with each other and with the

non-indigenous population. Education will lead to better jobs for and better treatment of indigenous people, especially women, who often do not have education and employment, and children, who are usually discriminated against in schools. There should be paying jobs also for indigenous people who continue to live in their own culture. Governments need representatives of indigenous people to consult about indigenous issues, and there should be more international documents that address the specific needs of the world's indigenous people.