

Closing Statement of the Indigenous People's Caucus
read by Damon Corrie on March 25, 2006 at OAS in Brasilia, Brazil.

Helaykwaba,

My name is Damon Gerard Corrie and I am the Hereditary Chief of the Eagle Clan Lokono-Arawaks of Guyana - though I live in exile in Barbados. It is my great honour and privilege to deliver this closing statement of the Indigenous People's Caucus.

Ambassador Juan Leon, Chair of the working Group,
Ms. Ana Pena, Councilor of the Permanent Mission of Peru and Vice-Chair of the working group,
Mr. Mercio Periero Gomes, President of FUNAI,
Dr. Isabel Madariaga of the Inter American Commission on Human Rights,
Dr. Luiz Toro of the legal advisor's office,
Distinguished representatives of the States,
Respected collaborators and special guests, and sisters and brothers -
distinguished representatives of the Indigenous Peoples.

We, the representatives of the nations and organizations of the indigenous peoples of Abya Ayala and members of the Caucus of Indigenous Peoples, extend our respectful remarks upon the closing of the seventh session of the Working Group for the search for consensus of the working group to prepare the draft American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples.

First, we would like to extend our extreme gratitude to the Brazilian government and our Indigenous brothers and sisters in Brazil and FUNAI and the the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for hosting this session of the Working Group - and for their warm hospitality. We would also like to extend our gratitude to the Brazilian government for providing members of the Indigenous Caucus with diplomatic visas, which greatly facilitated the ability of many of our members to attend and participate in this event. We hope that Indigenous representatives will be extended similar courtesies by all OAS members for future meetings.

Second, we would like to thank the States for your efforts to engage in meaningful dialogue and for your participation in informal consultations as we proceed in our quest for points of consensus. While we sometimes have different interests and concerns that we would like addresses in the declaration, we want to convey our heartfelt appreciation for your efforts. We are pleased with recent momentum in building consensus, particularly since our last session in Guatemala.

Thirdly, we would like to make a few comments regarding this important and historic process in which we are engaged. We have embarked on a process to turn a new page in the history of relations between Indigenous Peoples and

States. In this regard, Indigenous Peoples have a strong interest in establishing a new and respectful relationship with the states of the Americas. Indigenous Peoples have collective human rights, which must be reconciled and accommodated if we are to achieve the goal of creating this new and respectful relationship.

Throughout the vast history of our relations with the states of the Americas, it has been our collective rights that have been primarily denied and suppressed. For Indigenous Peoples, our collective rights ARE human rights. In this regard, any Declaration relating to the human rights of Indigenous Peoples cannot ignore our collective rights.

Fourthly, we would like to re-iterate a point that we have made at previous sessions. As these talks are directed at establishing a new relationship and involve our collective and individual rights, there must be full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples at each stage in order to reach true consensus. The search for consensus among us requires equity in the process and in results. In this context, we very much appreciate the contributions made to the Voluntary Fund. We would hope that these contributions could be substantially increased and that more countries invest in this process.

Fifthly, to facilitate the consensus building process, all States must consult with the Indigenous Peoples in their countries, seek the advice and counsel of their relevant national secretariats or ministries, and present their commentaries, criticisms and concerns on the text of the draft for the consideration of all.

Mr. Chair, in the name of the Caucus of Indigenous Peoples, we thank you for this opportunity to speak on these matters that will aid us in the difficult but critical task of adopting the Draft Declaration.