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# Indigenous Peoples in the Russian Federation

## A Preliminary Approach

  
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Indigenous Peoples make up about 15% of the total population of the Russian Federation. They vary in numbers from over one million to less than one thousand individuals. However, in Russian law, the term «small-numbered peoples» is used to determine who is Indigenous, the qualifier «small-numbered» being reserved for Peoples having a population of less than 50'000. Thus, the Russian state recognises such Peoples officially as «Indigenous» on the basis of a numerical criterion which is unique in international law and not supported by any international instrument dealing with Indigenous Peoples (Arakchaa 1996: 9). With the exception of the Saami in the Murmansk Region and the Nenets and Mansi of the northwestern Ural, most Indigenous Peoples in the Russian Federation live in Siberia and the Far East.

Russian territory covers all climatical zones except the tropical one: the arctic region, encompassing the Northern Polar Sea with its islands and ice-flows; the

subarctic region (tundra); the temperate zone comprising the taiga, mixed forests as well as forests and grass prairies; finally a subtropical zone comprising arid and desert regions. Indigenous Peoples live in all of these regions. Their traditional economies are mainly based on hunting, fishing and reindeer herding. Some Indigenous Peoples of Central Asia traditionally rely on a pastoral economy (sheep, camels, goats, and horses) (Vossen 1988: 77, 84).

Wherever they live, Indigenous Peoples have a special relationship with the lands and territories on which they depend for their survival. The degradation of their environment due to industrial development and poor management by the – mostly non-Indigenous – state authorities represents one of the most serious challenges Indigenous Peoples are facing in Russia today.

The short-term promotion of heavy industrialisation at the expense of long-term strategies of securing food supplies may well be the key problem of future

development in Russia. This is clearly spelt out in the Russian State Report on the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This report notes that at a time of severe economic crisis, food supply is in serious jeopardy, to the extent that in 1993, for example, Russia had to import foodstuffs and agricultural raw materials at a cost that amounted to 22,2 per cent of the total cost of imports for that period. Since 1991, various measures have been taken to regulate agricultural production, including Presidential Decree of 27 December 1991 on Urgent Measures to Implement Land Reforms, that *inter alia* calls upon existing agricultural enterprises to reorganise<sup>1</sup>.

At the same time, the land base reserved for traditional forms of food production by Indigenous Peoples (e.g. fishing, hunting and various types of pastoralism) is constantly being reduced by industrial development. In the Soviet era, traditional subsistence activities – although organised in state collectives – were promoted as a contribution to the provision of sufficient food supplies, especially in the Russian North. Simultaneously, however, the Soviet policy of heavy industrialisation with its «irrational methods of using renewable and non-renewable resources» and its neglect for the environment led to considerable ecological degradation in the North and has put the health of Indigenous Peoples at risk (Zaidfudim 1996: 16).

In its current attempt to foster democratisation and to establish a market economy, the State no more taps the traditional economic and ecological knowledge of Indigenous Peoples as a potential source for sustainable development than it did in the past. While the possible contribution of Indigenous Peoples to the development process has been recognised internationally, *inter alia* as part of the principles of Agenda 21 of the Rio Conference on Environment and Development (1992)<sup>2</sup>, this recognition is hardly reflected in Russian Indigenous policy<sup>3</sup>. Instead, the destruction of Indigenous lands and cultu-

ral systems, and the violation of their basic rights continue.

The question posed by this article is: What are the possible alternatives? In attempting a response, we offer a preliminary analysis of the present situation, followed by a perspective on what the future may hold for Russia's Indigenous Peoples.

## Being Indigenous in Siberia: A Case Study

Ten years ago there were huge reindeer herds in the Chukchi Autonomous Region. Today, probably 25% are left. Reindeer herding is not only a traditional activity of the inland Chukchis, it is also their fundamental way of life. Today it is dying out. Geologists and miners destroyed huge territories of reindeer pasture and their negligence often causes wild fires that have destroyed moss – the main food source for the reindeer. The Indigenous reindeer herders – still organised in state collectives – frequently do not get paid. The herders live a dismal life with barely any food (save for reindeer meat), gear, candles, etc. Because of their incredible poverty Indigenous communities are socially unstable. Herders give away their reindeer for a bottle of vodka. Regional and local administrations refuse to see and understand how critical the situation is. As a result, overwhelming despair spreads throughout Indigenous communities. This despair leads to apathy and passivity. Young people do not want to stay in the tundra or in their small communities – there is no money. They move to larger villages or towns, they cannot find their place in those communities, they begin to drink and they lose any desire and ability to work. The old people wait for the end of their lives with a bitter feeling that there is no one to whom they can pass on their knowledge and their way of life (Montada 1997: 7)<sup>4</sup>.

The Chukchi Autonomous Region extends along the Bering Strait in the

<sup>1</sup> See *Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Third Period Reports Submitted by State Parties, Addendum*; UN document E/1994/104/Add. 8), paragraphs 209-210.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 26 of *Agenda 21: Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development* (Rio de Janeiro, June 1992), «Recognising and Strengthening the Role of Indigenous Peoples and their Communities».

<sup>3</sup> Of course, this is true as well for many other states.

<sup>4</sup> Minor stylistic revision of the original text (C.B.).

remote north of eastern Siberia. The so-called inland Chukchi subsist on reindeer herding in the tundra, while the coastal Chukchi follow a mode of subsistence based on fishing and sea mammal hunting (Antropova and Kuznetsova 1964: 799). Russian colonisation did not reach the Chukchi until the 1930s. A fort established by cossacks on the Anadyr river in 1649 was abandoned in 1764 after more than a century of warfare between Russian soldiers and the Chukchi. Yet the Russian military was unable to conquer the Chukchi. As a result, the right of the Chukchi to their territory was recognised by treaty (the Treaty of 1837) which confirmed the prohibition of Russian settlements and trading posts in Chukchi territory (Forsyth 1992: 150). Only when Russian-Chukchi trade increased during the second half of the nineteenth century, did contacts between both groups intensify.

In the 1930s, collectivisation across Russia was forced in order to integrate remote areas such as Chukchi territory into the Soviet economy. Wherever possible, traditional economic activities like fishing, hunting and reindeer herding were organised in kolchozes and sovchozes (state collectives). In many cases, collectivisation also meant that Indigenous Peoples were deprived of their herds (Forsyth 1992: 293, 340). Nowadays, reprivatization causes additional problems because the original Indigenous owners rarely have the financial means either to reacquire enough animals to sustain a herding enterprise or to buy the necessary supplies to keep their enterprise going. For these and other reasons, the system of state collectives has survived though the herders are seldom paid, causing the financial breakdown of small Indigenous kolchozes<sup>5</sup>.

## Integrationist Policies and Their Consequences

In the 1950s and 1960s, forced collectivisation was supplemented by a programme of forced relocation. Indigenous People were driven from their traditional communities – generally small villages or temporary camp sites that were well adapted to the ecology of the region –, and concentrated in artificially created larger settlements. Thus traditional communities with their specific socio-cultural and economic structures were uprooted, and people of different cultural backgrounds were required to coexist and mix in these new settlements, and ultimately to assimilate to the Russian way of life. Needless to say, this made it difficult for individual Indigenous Peoples to maintain their own cultural traditions (Forsyth 1992: 89; Vakhtin 1992: 18; Ministry of Labour 1995: 9).

An important instrument of russification of Indigenous Peoples was the system of boarding schools: children between the ages of 1 and 16 were forced to attend schools located far away from their homes, and were prohibited from maintaining contact with their family or local community. The boarding schools were designed to change Indigenous children into Russians: they were not allowed to speak their language and were taught that their culture was inferior to Russian culture. When they eventually came home at the age of 15 or 17, they were strangers among their own kin. Moreover, they had not acquired the necessary skills to survive according to traditional subsistence patterns nor had they gained entry into the Russian world. Lost between two worlds, many of them went to live in the cities. Without perspectives for the future, they often turned to drink as compensation. These victims of the boarding school system are sometimes referred to as «the broken generation» (Vakhtin 1992: 22; Drillisch and Rohr 1995: 4)<sup>6</sup>.

For Indigenous Peoples, collectivisa-

<sup>5</sup> The Saami of the Kola Peninsula are confronted with the problem of having to raise funds to buy reindeer in order to prove their possession of sufficient herds to continue using their land traditionally and to prevent their territory from being leased out or sold (Schroedter 1997: 5). As to Chukchi reindeer collectives, they are not getting paid at all; for some this situation has lasted over a year now (Montada 1997). Nenets herders employed in state collectives (sovkhozes) also do not receive a salary, but at least they can obtain supplies on credit. Medical care is practically non-existent in the tundra (L'auravetl'an Indigenous Information Centre (L'auravetl'an IIC) 1996a: 13).

<sup>6</sup> Nowadays, boarding schools often offer Indigenous parents the only guarantee of securing adequate food for their children, with the result that many children are now brought to the schools by the parents themselves. In exchange for their physical survival they may well lose their culture. However, since today's boarding schools often lack funds, children still suffer from malnutrition, overcrowded shelters and psychological trauma. In order to fulfill their task, even these schools would need support («Open Letter from the Teachers and Children from the Village Farkovsky». *L'auravetl'an IIC Bulletin* 6 (Spring 1997), p. 4-5; Drillisch and Rohr 1995: 4).

tion, relocation and boarding schools have contributed significantly to the destruction of their way of life. The growing number of artificial boom towns built to facilitate resource extraction in their territories and the establishment of military bases after World War II complete the process by marginalising them in their own land. Moreover, because of the environmental degradation caused by resource exploitation, the basis for their traditional modes of subsistence is being eroded, affecting in turn their health<sup>7</sup>.

Vitamin deficiencies have increased significantly. The life expectancy of the Indigenous population lies ten years below the Russian average. Infant mortality among Indigenous People is 1,5 times higher than the average in the North, and 1,7 times higher than the Russian average. Chronic diseases are widespread in Indigenous communities, especially respiratory diseases such as tuberculosis (the tuberculosis rate among Indigenous People is 2,5 to three times higher than among the non-Indigenous population). After migration to large cities, Indigenous People are more frequently victims of disease: health problems rate 1,5 times higher among Indigenous city dwellers than among those who still live off the land.

Furthermore, accident and suicide rates are several times higher in an urban setting. Among the Chukchi, for example, suicide- and alcohol-related accidents are the major cause of death for those aged 30 to 35. Some of the highest rates of alcoholism have been registered in Indigenous areas of the North. The suicide rate among the Indigenous Peoples of the North is about three times higher than the average of the Russian Federation (Ministry of Labour 1995: 2; Zaidfudim 1996; Montada 1997). According to a government report, the main factors contributing to this situation are the disruption of the ecological balance in the Indigenous areas, abrupt changes in diet, low-quality infant nutrition, and higher susceptibility of Indigenous Peoples to infectious diseases. Another important factor is the psychological impact of an

abrupt break with the traditional way of life and age-old values that accompany the rapid integration of Indigenous Peoples into an industrial lifestyle (Ministry of Labour 1995: 5).

## The Traditional Economy and Industrial Development: Further Case Studies

The Yamal-Nenetz Autonomous Region<sup>8</sup> was created in 1930. Its capital, Salekhard, the only city in the world located on the polar circle, was founded 400 years ago by Russian cossacks. This tundra region of 750'000 km<sup>2</sup> has 300'000 lakes and 48'000 rivers; the main rivers are tributaries of the Ob. In this traditional homeland of the Nenetz, Khanty and Selkoop, tremendous oil and gas deposits were discovered especially in the 1950s (the most important sites are at Medvezhic, Urengoy and Yamburg). Several mining towns were established over the last forty years. The region has become one of the richest sites for the extraction of natural gas in the world, and the most important centre for oil production in Russia (L'auravetl'an IIC 1996a: 13).

In the Khanty-Mansi and Yamal-Nenetz Autonomous Regions alone, eleven million ha of reindeer pasture and some 20'000 ha of spawning and feeding grounds were permanently lost as a result of gas and oil exploitation, and over one hundred rivers, large and small, were polluted. In the Yamal-Nenetz Autonomous Region, 28 rivers and dozens of lakes can no longer be fished; 17'000 ha of spawning and feedings grounds, and over 500'000 ha of woodland and pastures were destroyed. Hundreds of tons of valuable white fish and sturgeon die annually because of water pollution, as the oil and gas industry takes little interest in undertaking conservation measures. This has had enormous repercussions on

<sup>7</sup> For the links between environmental degradation by resource extraction and the health situation of Indigenous Peoples in the North, see in particular Zaidfudim (1996).

<sup>8</sup> Autonomous Regions have their own parliament, government and governor, as well as their own legislation. They may form part of larger territorial units such as an *oblast* (comparable to a province or a state), or they may form an autonomous entity. All Autonomous Regions are represented in the Council of Federation, the upper chamber of the Russian Parliament, by their government and speakers of their parliament. It should be noted that the heads of parliament or government as well as the representatives in the *Duma* (the lower chamber of the Russian Federal Parliament) are generally non-Indigenous; this is partly due to the fact that Indigenous Peoples have become numerical minorities because of the importance of Russian migration to Autonomous Regions following the policy of russification.

the traditional lifestyle of the Indigenous inhabitants of the region (Ministry of Labour 1995: 10)

The Khanty for example are reindeer herders. Reindeer mainly subsist on moss that grows only 1-2 mm per year. Since reindeer herding requires constant migration to avoid overusing or destroying this fragile resource, Khanty families generally move between four and ten traditional camp sites according to a specific pattern of pasture use. Reindeer provide meat, material for winter clothes, bedding and tents. Furthermore, reindeer sledges are still a major means of transportation in winter, well adapted to the ecology of the tundra since they do not damage the moss layer. A family subsisting entirely on reindeer needs between fifty and one hundred animals for its economic survival. However, a number of families have lost their herds partly or entirely due to environmental pollution, especially by the oil industry (Drillisch and Rohr 1995: 4).

In the Nenetz Autonomous Region, three quarters of the landbase is used for reindeer herding. The Nenetz possess a total of 200'000 animals. With the reduction of pastures under the impact of resource extraction, the tundra tends to be overused by the herders. The moss layer of the tundra is easily destroyed by vehicles and drilling or mining activities, while the regeneration of damaged areas may take a century or longer. The oil industry has already left behind 320 abandoned drilling stations in the heart of Nenetz reindeer pastures – some of them dating back to 1977<sup>9</sup>. These locations and the surrounding tundra can no longer be used for reindeer herding. The oil industry argues that the damaged tundra cannot be recultivated because of lack of funds. For their part, the Nenetz reindeer herders fear that the tundra will become barren land if the destruction continues. Already feeling the pressure of reduced pastures, they fear that the destruction of their traditional economy and way of life would condemn them as a people<sup>10</sup>.

Massive exploitation of natural resources leading in turn to environmental degrada-

tion and land loss, affects nearly all Indigenous Peoples in the Russian Federation. The industries with the heaviest impact are oil and gas extraction, mining and logging. Pollution from heavy-industry complexes adds to the environmental destruction. Furthermore, nuclear pollution has had serious repercussions for the Indigenous population, especially in the Arctic where it mostly derives from military installations (also sources of chemical pollution), the activities of the Northern fleet, the Bilibino nuclear reactor in Chukotka, and the Novaya Zemlia nuclear test site (L'auravetl'an IIC 1996b: 5). The Nenetz and Komi have also been adversely affected by these nuclear tests. As to the Shorsk People of the Kemerovo Region, they have endured the fallout of the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing (Schroedter 1997: 3).

Another factor must be taken into account when considering the future of traditional Indigenous subsistence activities, namely the breakdown of the centralised state economy, and especially the decline of the productive sector. Due to the unbalanced infrastructure and the lack of employment alternatives, Indigenous People are facing high unemployment rates, especially among women, and a serious deterioration in their standard of living. Thus, traditional economic activities often remain the only way to secure food and a basic income (Ministry for Labour 1995; Schroedter 1997; Drillisch and Rohr 1995).

What is at stake is the very survival of Indigenous Peoples. Furthermore, the policy depriving Indigenous Peoples of their land base and typical modes of subsistence not only leads to malnutrition and poverty among Indigenous Peoples themselves but also reduces overall food production for the Russian internal market and the potential for sustainable development in the regions concerned. Instead of taking advantage of traditional forms of food production, recent policies only compound the problems brought about by the economic crisis which the Russian Federation is undergoing at present.

<sup>9</sup> Information provided by the Chairman of the Regional Committee for Land Reforms and Land Resources in the Nenetz Autonomous Region.

<sup>10</sup> «Indigenous News: Nenetz Autonomous Region». *L'auravetl'an IIC Bulletin* 3 (Winter 1996), p. 16.

## The Legal Situation

The legal status of Indigenous Peoples within the Russian Federation is as ambiguous as the question of their economic survival. Although Indigenous rights are said to be legally protected, existing federal laws and constitutional provisions are often contradicted or ignored – by decrees enacted by regional authorities at the local level, by different state bodies at the federal level, and even by the President himself.

In theory, Indigenous rights are protected under Articles 9, 72 and 69 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation. Article 9 provides that «land and other natural resources are used and preserved in the Russian Federation as the basis for the life and activities of the peoples residing in their respective territories». Article 72 compels the state «to protect the primordial habitat and traditions of small ethnic communities». Finally, Article 69 confirms the rights of «aboriginal peoples in accordance with the generally recognised principles and standards of international law and international agreements signed by the Russian Federation».

These general principles are further elaborated by Presidential decrees and other legislation. Thus the Framework Forestry Legislation of 1992<sup>11</sup> provides that in the regions inhabited and used by Indigenous Peoples or ethnic groups, «procedures shall be established for the use of forests with a view to preserving and fostering the necessary living and traditional farming conditions»<sup>12</sup>. Another example is Presidential Decree No. 397<sup>13</sup>, which provides that local state bodies, in cooperation with Indigenous Peoples, endeavour to delimitate the territories to be set aside for traditional landuse; such territories are declared inalienable and therefore cannot be sold without the consent of the Indigenous party, or be made available for industrial or other purposes not related to traditional land-use.

Nevertheless, reality demonstrates that for Indigenous Peoples in the Russian

Federation, not even basic rights such as their very means of subsistence are guaranteed. The Saami of the Kola Peninsula provide a typical example. Shortly before Presidential Decree No. 397 was issued, the local governor of Murmansk County passed temporary Decree No. 100 regarding the exploitation of aquatic resources, which permits lakes and rivers of the region to be leased to the highest bidder. The decree not only contradicts Presidential Decree No. 397 but also Decree No. 84 of the Council of Ministers of the Russian Federation (March 1991), which grants priority rights to Indigenous Peoples for fishing, hunting and reindeer herding on their land. Saami protests were not heeded. Rather, the Saami are now barred from fishing the rivers in their traditional territory since fishing rights were leased to tourist companies (Schroedter 1997: 5; Henriksen 1996: 14).

The Nivkh of Sakhalin Island find themselves in a similar position. An international oil consortium is going forward with the exploitation of huge oil deposits off the island's northeastern shelf, with a view to increasing oil production from 1,6 to 30 million tons, and natural gas production from 1,9 to 28 billion m<sup>3</sup> annually. For the Nivkh, the provisions of Presidential Decree No. 397 have not yet served any practical use. The Indigenous inhabitants of Sakhalin were neither involved in the project, nor consulted on the industrial development of their territories despite the fact that Article 7 (3) of Federal Decree No. 225 signed by President Yeltsin on December 30, 1995 states:

«If there is any work done under an agreement on territories of traditional habitat and activities of small-numbered ethnic populations, the investor must take all necessary measures to protect the traditional environment and the way of life of these populations.»<sup>14</sup>

The Nivkh People living on the shores of Sakhalin Island are concerned about the further destruction of their territory, in particular fishing sites and hunting grounds for sea mammals (the traditional

<sup>11</sup> Framework Forestry Legislation, 6 March 1992, *Gazette of the Congress of People's Deputies of the Russian Federation and the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation* (Moscow), 1993, No. 15, art. 533.

<sup>12</sup> See State Duma (1995: 4, 15).

<sup>13</sup> Decree of the President of the Russian Federation, 22 April 1992, «Urgent measures to protect the lands inhabited and farmed by the Northern Aboriginal Peoples» No. 397, in: *Gazette of the Congress of People's Deputies of the Russian Federation and the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation* (Moscow), 1992, No. 18, art. 1009.

<sup>14</sup> Translated from Russian by L'auravet'l'an IIC.

Nivkh economy is based on fresh water and maritime fishing, hunting and gathering of wild plants). Already 40% of the island are being used by the oil and gas industries, which has led to a considerable reduction of Nivkh hunting and fishing grounds due to environmental damage (Igrain 1996: 11; 1997: 3).

These examples offer an idea of the legal «protection» Indigenous Peoples can claim within the Russian Federation. The International Conference to Assist Russian Federal Programmes Supporting Aboriginal Peoples of the North concluded that «the questions of the land rights, natural resources, self-determination and self-government of the Indigenous peoples remained unregulated», and underlined «the urgency of action in this regard»<sup>15</sup>.

As to Article 69 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, legal obligations derive from the fact that Russia is a signatory of the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (both are part of the International Bill of Rights that «addresses the rights of all individuals and peoples equally, which include the rights of Indigenous people»<sup>16</sup>). The first two articles of both Covenants read:

«1. All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. 2. All people may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic co-operation, based upon the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.»<sup>17</sup>

Indigenous Peoples are being deprived of their means of subsistence because of land appropriation and pollution. Moreover, environmental degradation and lack of respect for existing legal obligations regarding Indigenous participation in decision-making cause further strain on the social and cultural fabric, as well as on their

health situation. Undeniably, this state of affairs is in violation of existing Russian legislation and international instruments. Failure to implement the provisions of the Covenants regarding the survival of Indigenous Peoples also violates Article 69 of the Russian Constitution, as indicated above. Accordingly, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recently «expressed its concern at the situation of the Indigenous Peoples of the [Russian Federation], many of whom live in poverty, have inadequate access to food supplies, and some of whom suffer from malnutrition; it recommended that action be taken to protect them from exploitation by oil and gas companies»<sup>18</sup>.

## Conclusions and Perspectives

Indigenous Peoples in the Russian Federation benefit neither from the democratisation process nor from the establishment of a market economy. Instead, their basic human rights are being violated despite existing legal protection. Indigenous Peoples' participation in the democratic process and in the creation of legislation concerning them are not yet established practice. Although existing federal principles of democratic decision-making in a multicultural state would provide an appropriate framework for the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples, no use has been made of these possibilities. However, stability in a multicultural state derives from inclusion rather than exclusion.

A major step forward with respect to democratic participation and the implementation of federal principles would be the recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights to self-determination. In close cooperation with Indigenous Peoples, mechanisms for the exercise of that right at the federal as well as the local and regional levels should be created immediately, providing for the participation of Indigenous Peoples in decision-making on

<sup>15</sup> See *Final Statement of the International Conference to Assist Russian Federal Programmes Supporting Aboriginal Peoples of the North*, Arkhangelsk, 11-13 September 1995. International participants at this conference included representatives of the Governments of Finland, Norway, Canada and the European Parliament, as well as representatives of international agencies such as UNDP, UNEP, UNICEF and the ILO. Russian Federation participants included representatives of Indigenous Peoples, local and regional administrations, members of the Russian State *Duma* (Parliament) as well as the Deputy Minister for Nationalities and Regional Affairs, the Head of the Department for Demographic and Social Policies of the Ministry of Labour and other government representatives (cf. Schroedter 1997: 2).

<sup>16</sup> Centre for Human Rights/Equality and Human Rights Coordination Branch, International Labour Office 1995: *International Human Rights Law and Indigenous and Tribal Peoples*. Paper presented to the International Conference to Assist Russian Federal Programmes Supporting Aboriginal Peoples of the North. Arkhangelsk, 11-13 September 1995, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI) of 16 Dec 1966; Entry into force 23 March 1976 in accordance with article 49; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cul-

matters concerning them, as well as for the monitoring of the existing legal policy implementation. The establishment of these two mechanisms would provide a basis for improving the human rights situation of Indigenous Peoples within the Russian Federation; it would also contribute to the democratisation process in Russia. Indigenous Peoples need to be recognised as equal partners in the enforcement of relevant legal provisions. It is in this context that projects such as the L'auravetl'an Indigenous Information Centre find their place, the Centre's role being to allow Indigenous Peoples in Russia access to basic information regarding their rights both nationally and internationally, and thus to contribute to empowering them for full participation in such relevant decision-making bodies.

With regard to solving the economic crisis of the Russian Federation, Indigenous Peoples should be viewed as part of the solution rather than the problem. Chapter 26 of Agenda 21 of the Rio Conference on Environment and Development (1992) is most relevant in this regard:

«Indigenous people and their communities have a historical relationship with their lands. [...] They have developed over many generations a holistic traditional scientific knowledge of their lands, natural resources and environment. [...] Their ability to participate fully in sustainable development practices on their lands has tended to be limited as a result of factors of an economic, social and historical nature. In view of the interrelationship between the natural environment and its sustainable development and the cultural, social, economic and physical well-being of Indigenous people, national and international efforts to implement environmentally sound and sustainable development should recognize, accommodate, promote and strengthen the role of Indigenous people and their communities.»<sup>19</sup>

Indigenous economic and subsistence systems can provide a valuable contribution to sustainable development on a regional and local level, thus also benefiting

overall economic development in the Russian Federation. The protection of traditional food production and Indigenous cultural systems should be a priority for Russian development policy.

By viewing the knowhow and survival of Indigenous Peoples as vital components of any sustainable development process, one is confronted with a vast field of multi-disciplinary study in which anthropology plays an important role. International donor organisations should consider feasibility studies requested by Indigenous Peoples on the question of how their economic and cultural potential can contribute to sustainable and self-reliant development<sup>20</sup>. Indigenous Peoples need to be recognised as full partners in any development and democratisation process.

tural Rights. Adopted by General Assembly res 2200 A (XXI) of 16 December 1966; Entry into force 3 January 1976 in accordance with article 17.

<sup>18</sup> DPI-Releases, Round-Up HR/ESC/97/23, 16 May 1997: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights concludes 16th session. United Nations Information Service, Geneva. (At its 16th session the Committee considered and made recommendations on state reports on the implementation of the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the following countries: Zimbabwe, Russian Federation, Peru, Libya.)

<sup>19</sup> Chapter 26.1 of *Agenda 21: Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development* (Rio de Janeiro, June 1992), paragraph 26.1.

<sup>20</sup> A pioneering example is the funding of a feasibility study of a pilot project to improve the Chukchi food situation by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorate General International Cooperation (DGIS); see de Beer and Arnason (1996).

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## Abstract

Indigenous Peoples in the Russian Federation benefit neither from the democratisation process nor from the establishment of a market economy. Instead, the destruction of Indigenous lands and cultural systems, and the violation of their basic rights continue despite existing legal protection.

The land base reserved for traditional forms of food production by Indigenous Peoples (e.g. fishing, hunting and various types of pastoralism) is constantly being reduced by industrial development causing severe environmental degradation. The short-term promotion of heavy industrialisation at the expense of long-term strategies of securing food supplies may well be the key problem of future development in Russia. Indigenous economic and subsistence systems can provide a valuable contribution to sustainable development on a regional and local level, thus also benefiting overall economic development in the Russian Federation. The protection of traditional food production and Indigenous cultural systems should be a priority for Russian development policy.

## Authors

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The L'auravetl'an Indigenous Information Centre is a project by and for Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Federation, financed in part by the TACIS Democracy Programme of the European Union. The Centre's work focuses on three areas: human rights education for Indigenous representatives; the circulation of information about the national and international human rights and Indigenous rights situation among Indigenous communities; and on providing information on the situation of Indigenous Peoples in Russia to non-Indigenous sectors within and without the Federation. To this end, the Centre publishes a *Bulletin*, for which contributions are provided by Indigenous interns at the Centre. This article largely relies on information taken from these *Bulletins*.

*David Monongue (Hopi)  
dans les jardins de l'O.N.U.  
1977*

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