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Petition for the Restoration of the Rights of the Indigenous Ainu People
(Group & Individual Endorsement)

After 25 years of tireless struggle by the worlds' indigenous peoples, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was adopted by the UN General Assembly on the 13th of September, 2007. This declaration concludes that the theft by dominant nations of "the indigenous peoples' inherent rights, including rights to land, territory and resources," and the implementation of "internal colonization" and execution of assimilation policies are "historical injustices."

It also ensures the right to self-determination, guaranteeing political freedom as "a bare-minimum right for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world" and calls for the revitalization of deprived rights, such as the rights to land, resources, and compensation, the rights to fully enjoy and pass on indigenous cultures, and the right to education. These rights are by no means newly created, but have been firmly established as guaranteed to all people by international law. Indigenous peoples have been blatantly denied of these rights and robbed of the ability to enjoy them.

With this declaration as a backdrop, both houses of the Japanese parliament adopted a resolution calling for the recognition of the Ainu as an indigenous people of Japan on June 6th, 2008. In the following month, the government established the Expert Panel on Ainu Policy and on July 29th, 2009, the panel's final report, summarizing "new philosophies on Ainu policy-making and concrete suggestions for measures to be taken," was submitted to the Chief Cabinet Secretary.

Ainu people had been aspiring for governmental and parliamentary recognition as an indigenous people for generations and thus its realization inspired the souls of the Ainu Utari (fellow Ainu people)..

However, it has become increasingly clear that despite the Japanese government's claims that the Ainu are recognized as indigenous people, they are still not recognized as indigenous people *with rights*, in the UNDRIP sense. This governmental attitude is

strongly reflected in the expert report which posits that the Ainu (subject people) and Japanese (dominant people) were “equal citizens under the law,” thereby ignoring the historical responsibility of the modern Japanese Imperial State for forcibly robbing the Ainu of Ainu Mosir (the land where Ainu live) as if it were ownerless, making over 20% of Ainu Mosir (Hokkaido) the emperor’s land while implementing policies of colonization and assimilation.

This “internal colonization” of Ainu Mosir within Japanese borders and subsequent imperial assimilation policy set the precedent for the annexation of the Ryukyu Islands, the colonization of Taiwan and Korea as well as the invasion of China and other parts of Asia. Nevertheless, the Expert Panel on Ainu Policy’s final report does not utter a word about the suffering and sacrifice of the Ainu people due to the governmental policy to annihilate and assimilate them into Japanese people. The report also neglects to discuss the responsibility of the emperor and Japanese government as perpetrators in usurping Ainu independence and dismantling their entire social, economic and political system. Moreover, there is no mention of the indignities that the Ainu suffered such as being coerced into using Japanese, and being forced to change their names and receive imperial assimilatory education, as well as having their traditional lifestyle and indigenous customs and practices prohibited. Furthermore, the report implies that the Ainu people are responsible for being robbed of their land, language and culture while also illegitimately insinuating that the lack of “the concept of ‘land-ownership’ or a written language” made them ill-fit for modernization.

With this lack of awareness about history as a premise, it is difficult to expect the government to issue an apology or provide compensation, let alone facilitate the lawful return of indigenous rights or self-determination rights. While the report does mention UNDRIP, it also denies the rights of the indigenous Ainu people and only suggests insignificant measures, such as providing cultural education and social welfare, which only serve to cover-up the poverty and cultural loss of the Ainu people. Now the government is forcing Ainu people to be satisfied with these trivial measures and give up on their rights as indigenous people.

The Japanese government has never expressed redress for their 140 year long colonization and assimilation policy against Ainu people. As late as 1991 the government officially announced in their report concerning the “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights” that Japan is a “homogenous country” and maintained the 1899 Hokkaido Former Aboriginal Protection Act until 1997. Even now within Japanese society, there remains a strongly-rooted sense of disdain towards Ainu people as a “dying race” and a belief that Japan is a homogenous nation. The Ainu Culture Promotion Law enacted in 1997 ignores the historical discrimination against Ainu people and only focuses on the promotion of culture, neglecting to assure Ainu rights.

The Ainu people have been fighting against assimilation within this paradigm, by persistently raising their voices for the eradication of discrimination and the restoration of their rights, and by respecting traditional culture and indigenous ways of knowing that have been passed on from their ancestors who sacrificed so much. Now we would like to maintain solidarity with their voices, not to seek “protection” or a “blessing” from the government, but rather, to demand the recognition of the modern Japanese Imperial State’s historical responsibility and the restoration of the indigenous and self-determination rights as stipulated in UNDRIP. Upon agreement of the statement above, we would also like to urge the Japanese government to engage in charanke (dialogue) on equal footing with representatives from all Ainu organizations and conduct a review of Ainu policies. By receiving your signature on this petition, we sincerely hope that in solidarity with you, we can encourage the government to move in the right direction.

This petition does not only seek to rectify the injustices of the Japanese government but to transform the ideas of Japanese people and the ideas within Japanese society about human rights, democracy and sense of history. It is paramount that we create a future where we can have an equal and trusting relationship with all of our neighbors, including indigenous peoples. We sincerely ask for your cooperation.

(1) The following two items are the content of the petition. We would like to make the first collection of signatures by the end of January.

1. We urge you to recognize the historical responsibility of the modern Japanese Imperial state in forcibly robbing the Ainu’s inherent rights to land, resources and territory, and to implement the restoration of indigenous rights and self-determination rights as stipulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (adopted in 2007).
2. Upon agreement of the statement above, we urge you to engage in charanke (dialogue) on equal footing with representatives from all Ainu organizations and conduct a review of Ainu policies.

(2) Please send your petition (group or individual) to the following address. It is also possible to send a fax or email. Please be sure to write your group’s name with the name of a representative and an address in the content of your email, indicating you are in agreement with the demands as outlined above. If you would like to send your petition by fax or through the post, please email us and we will send you a form to send back to us.

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