Self-Determination and the Health of Indigenous Peoples

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“[P]eoples in independent countries . . . are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, regain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions.”
There are an estimated 370 million indigenous peoples living in more than 70 countries worldwide. They represent a rich diversity of cultures, religions, traditions, languages and histories; yet continue to be among the world's most marginalized population groups. The health status of indigenous peoples varies significantly from that of non-indigenous population groups in countries all over the world.

http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs326/en/
Article 1, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

Article 3 of the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:

“All [Indigenous] peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”

“[W]e have significant concerns with respect to the wording of the current text, including the provisions on lands, territories and resources; free, prior and informed consent when used as a veto; self-government without recognition of the importance of negotiations; intellectual property; military issues; and the need to achieve an appropriate balance between the rights and obligations of indigenous peoples, member States and third parties.”
“The Government of Australia supports and encourages the full and free engagement of indigenous peoples in the democratic decision-making processes in their country, but it does not support a concept that could be construed as encouraging action that would impair, even in part, the territorial and political integrity of a state with a system of democratic representative government.”
Resolution from the Fiftieth World Health Assembly, Ninth plenary meeting, 13 May 1997

REQUESTS the Director-General:

- (1) to continue to facilitate the work of the focal point for the International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People;
- (2) to submit to the Fifty-first World Health Assembly a report reviewing progress in finalizing a comprehensive programme of action for the Decade, developed in consultation with national governments and organizations of indigenous people;
- (3) to further encourage countries to develop health programmes for indigenous people, taking into account both the need for active participation at the local level in the whole health process, and the need for cultural sensitivity of health services and the participation of health care workers of indigenous origin.

http://www.who.int/hhr/WHA%2050.31%20International%20Decade.pdf
Nursing station closure, Cross Lake, 1999

NURSING STATION
IS CLOSED
INDEFINITELY.
ONLY EMERGENCIES
WILL BE SEEN.
LIFE OR DEATH
SITUATIONS e.g. Heart attack
uncontrolled bleeding; choking.
Wake for suicide victim, Cross Lake, 1999
“Forebay” near Cross Lake, MB, 1998
“[R]ecognition of a people’s fundamental right to self-determination must include . . . the right to inherit the collective identity of one’s people, and to transform that identity creatively according to the self-defined aspirations of one’s people and one’s own generation. It must include the freedom to live outside the cage created by other peoples’ images and projections” (cited in Smith 2004: 16).
“Health to Aboriginal peoples is a matter of determining all aspects of their life, including control over their physical environment, of dignity, of community self-esteem, and of justice. It is not merely a matter of the provision of doctors, hospitals, medicines or the absence of disease and incapacity.”

“The development of indigenous peoples' health is inextricably linked to their wider social, cultural, economic and political development. The ways in which indigenous peoples measure the health and vitality of their community is also different from the conventional concept of health. The degree of self-governance, the ability to participate in cultural practices and expressions, extent of access to traditional lands, or the numbers of speakers of their language may be considered indicators of equal importance as access to health services or the incidence rates of diabetes, tuberculosis, or malaria, of the health of the indigenous peoples.”

http://www.dialoguebetweennations.com/N2N/PFII/English/HealthReporttoPF.htm
“As the major determinants lie outside the direct influence of the conventional health sector, there is an urgent need to directly involve the social, economic, cultural and political sectors.”
Geneva Declaration on the Health and Survival of Indigenous Peoples, 1999

The gap between government policy and effective action, “stems [in part] from the failure to recognise Indigenous Peoples' rights to self-determination, and to adhere to the principles of holism, meaningful participation, mutual respect and reciprocity, and to recognise the validity and revitalisation of Indigenous cultures and institutions.”