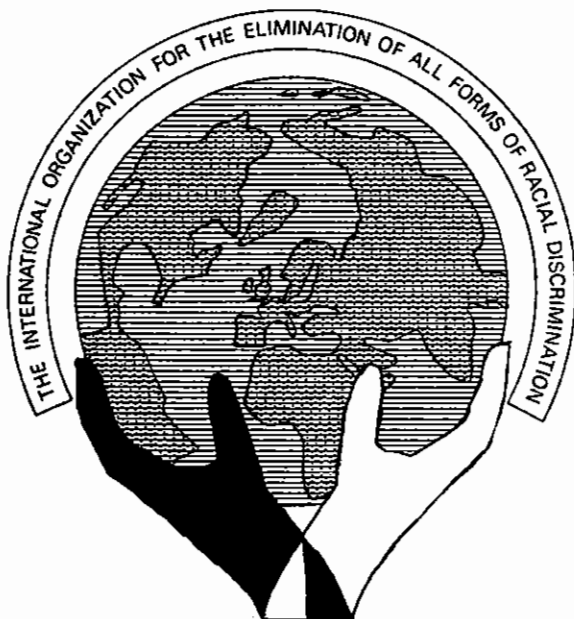


**THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION
FOR THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF
RACIAL DISCRIMINATION
(EAFORD)**

Paper No.8



**A QUESTION OF IDENTITY
AND SELF-FULFILMENT**

by

Dr Anis Al-Qasem

and

Dr Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira

On 5th July 1979, the Secretary General of EAFORD presented to Dr Robert Cardoso de Oliveira the certificate of EAFORD's International Award for the Furtherance of Human Understanding for his outstanding work in the field of the indigenous people of Brazil.

In this pamphlet, we publish the presentation address and the reply.

The views expressed in this Paper are those of the author, and do not necessarily represent those of EAFORD.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Reprinted by EAFORD, November 1982

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and

Dr Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira

PRESENTATION ADDRESS

A QUESTION OF IDENTITY

I deeply regret that I cannot address you in one of the two languages which both of us should have been able to use: Portuguese and Arabic. Unfortunately, I do not know Portuguese and probably most of you do not know Arabic. I say this because both of us are the heirs of that great civilization which flourished for centuries in Andalusia. That great heritage, which kindled the Renaissance in Europe, we both share and each of us, in our own way, should try to revive and enrich so that, once more, it can make its own contribution to world civilization.

On this occasion, Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, there can be no place more proper than the University of Brazilia or a gathering more appropriate than this illustrious gathering to honour the distinguished scholar who is one of the first two recipients of the International Award for the Furtherance of Human Understanding. This is not only because Professor Cardoso de Oliveira is a professor of this eminent centre of learning and has been connected with it for a good part of his intellectual life, but also because the University and its men are the proper forum for celebrating achievements in the field of human understanding.

Role of the University

One role which no distinguished university can or should abandon or neglect to perform: that role is to keep the conscience of society alive with the truth, and its heart beating into generation after generation the values of justice, dignity, equality, self-fulfilment and self-determination for all persons and all peoples. In its relentless search for the truth and in its objective presentation of the achievements of the human race, the university makes its invaluable contribution to the elimination of prejudice and egotism and opens wider and wider the minds of successive generations to the human race and to the contribution to world advancement made by all races.

For indeed, civilization has never been and will never be the monopoly of one race or a group of races. Not only that, but the torch of civilization has been carried by one people after the other so that it is safe to say that the

human mind has always been active to build and construct.

It is these values which we need to re-emphasize because they are the foundation of the well-being of individuals and societies alike. They are the foundation on which harmony and constructive cooperation within the community of nations can be raised. No society can expect to build on prejudice and discrimination anything but hate, conflict and bloodshed.

To combat the dangers to human rights and world peace, it is essential that people should be enlightened as to the falsity and grave risks of doctrines and policies based on discrimination because of race, colour or ethnic origin. It is for this objective that the International Organisation for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination was established. Our concern is not limited to this or that ideology of superiority. We are against *all* such ideologies and policies and we are *for* human understanding and cooperation.

Ethnic Identity

One of the significant features which characterise our times is the search by ethnic groups for identity, national, cultural or both. Such a movement constitutes, in some aspects, a rejection of the previous attempts and philosophies of assimilation or forced cultural integration as the best solutions for ethnic problems. In that sense, such movement is also a rejection of ideologies of ethnic or racial superiority, and an implementation of the historical truth that people, regardless of their ethnic origin, are capable of making their distinctive contribution to the world.

This is a healthy development, since every ethnic group will attempt not only to discover its own heritage, and, in the process attempt to understand the heritage of others, but also to endeavour to add another tributary to the great river of human civilization and achievement.

No doubt, such affirmation of identity is likely to produce a vital reconstruction of some aspects of society, including the privileges enjoyed by dominant groups since the exercise of such privileges will adversely affect the self-fulfilment and development of the victims of ethnic discrimination.

And the struggle arises between the dominant group which tries to maintain and perpetuate its dominance and the victims who see that, in order to develop freely, they must remove such dominance.

Dangers and falsehoods

Herein lies the danger to world peace and societal harmony. The concept of superiority, which, in the words of the UNESCO Declaration on Racism and Racial Prejudice, is historically linked with inequalities in power, reinforced by economic and social differences between individuals and groups, is totally without justification. However, advocates of racial or ethnic superiority still try to justify, on false ethnic premises, their superiority and their claim, in order to deprive others from equality in dignity and rights which are due to them from the fact of their humanity.

In this manner, advocates of ethnic superiority preach and practice

doctrines which lead to strife and conflict internationally and societally, and fall into the inherent fallacy in their philosophy. While accepting ethnicity as the criterion of achievement, they deny the universality of such hypothesis by limiting achievement to certain defined ethnic groups to the exclusion of others.

Moreover, they will not, if they can, permit their ideology to be tested pragmatically. To be tested pragmatically, all individuals and ethnic groups should be given equal opportunity to acquire knowledge and develop. However, the universal weapon used by racists is the very denial of equal opportunity, which fact in itself convicts the ideologies of ethnic or racial superiority. The dominant group tries always to keep its victims in a state of backwardness and uses that enforced backwardness as a vindication of ethnic superiority.

The truth, to quote again from the UNESCO Declaration, is that "All peoples of the world possess equal faculties for attaining the highest level in intellectual, technical, social, economic, cultural and political development" and that "the differences between the achievements of the different peoples are entirely attributable to geographical, historical, political, economic, social and cultural factors" and that "such differences can in no case serve as a pretext for any rank-ordered classification of nations or peoples".

One of the factors which help to disseminate ideas of superiority is the general ignorance of the achievements of other peoples, and the ethnic stereotypes that are created through various means of publicity. For example, to any person who is acquainted with this history of world civilization, it must be surprising to find books circulating among students and the public at large which omit any meaningful reference to the contribution made by Arab Moslem civilization to western civilization. It is the more surprising, because that influence was exercised particularly from Andalusia and Sicily, which are both in Europe. However, the prejudice which eliminated references to such civilization led to further prejudice and false sense of superiority against Arabs and Moslems.

UN and racism

Thus, to counteract doctrines of racial or ethnic superiority, which endanger world peace and social harmony, the United Nations directed special attention to the problem. In 1963 the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, from which came the name of our Organisation. In 1965, the General Assembly adopted the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and, benefitting from the experience of other United Nations agencies, UNESCO adopted, in November 1978, the Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice. It is significant to note that a great power, which clamours for human rights, has shelved the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and that only one

state member of UN stands out as the only one which has positively rejected to be a party to that Convention: namely, Israel.

Apart from the general attempt to alert peoples to the dangers of discrimination based on race, colour or ethnic origin, the General Assembly of the United Nations dealt specifically with two doctrines which it considered as forms of racism and racial discrimination: apartheid and zionism.

In addition, two international conferences were held under the auspices of United Nations: one in Lagos to discuss apartheid, and the second in Geneva to discuss racial discrimination in general.

Much of the suffering in the world is caused by ethnic ideologies of superiority which lead to prejudice and to indifference to and direct violation of the basic rights of the victims of such ideologies. Despite the ominous lessons of history the followers of such ideologies believe that, by adopting and implementing such ideologies they permanently protect their interests and perpetually prevent the victims from obtaining what is theirs. Thus, racists adopt policies not only of oppression, violation and denial of the rights of their victims, but if need be, the denial of their very existence.

This denial of the rights and very existence of a people has led to attempts at the physical or national extermination of such people, if they try to claim their rights. The indigenous people of some countries have been physically exterminated and others are presently threatened with extermination, particularly in the case of those victims who are engaged in a national liberation struggle against their racist foreign oppressors.

The tragedy is that such ideologues refuse to learn from history and from the nature of human aspirations for equality in dignity and rights. These aspirations may be forcefully subdued for a while, even for some generations, but they do not die. The decolonisation process which we have witnessed in recent years is a fulfilment of those aspirations; and so is the constant and pressing concern of the international community for the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, the observance of human rights and the rights of indigenous peoples; and so is the liberation struggles in Africa, Palestine and elsewhere.

Equality with differentiation

Different ethnic groups, like different nations, have to learn to live together in dignity and equality. Different ethnic groups, even within the same political entity, have the right to develop in their own way as a part of their right to self-determination. There is no need for forced assimilation. The beauty of a garden is in the diversity and harmony of its flowers, and no giant oak tree can give the daintiness and fragrance of a pansy or a daffodil. The garden is beautiful with them all: the different colours, the different heights, the different flowering seasons. Only the weeds, the false doctrines of ethnic superiority which, if left, would ruin the garden, should be removed and not allowed to grow. The weeds appear when we neglect the garden and their appearance is a reminder of such neglect and the threat

they can pose to the health and beauty of the garden.

Article 10 of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination calls upon the United Nations, the specialised agencies, States and non-governmental organisations to do all in their power to promote energetic action which will make possible the abolition of all forms of racial discrimination. In particular, it calls upon them to study the causes of such discrimination with a view to recommending appropriate and effective measures to combat and eliminate it.

Our organization, as a non-governmental organisation, responded to this call in a number of ways. We held and participated in conferences dealing with the general question of discrimination or with discrimination within certain societies; we prepared studies on some discriminatory doctrines and on discriminatory legislation; and we are giving fellowships to students preparing their university doctorates on aspects of discrimination.

For that same purpose and to encourage scholars to study and publish, the Organization created the International Award for the Furtherance of Human Understanding which it gives annually in respect of the best books published on the subject in English, French, Arabic and Spanish/Portuguese. In addition to the certificate, the award carries with it a cash payment of five thousand dollars. The first recipients of the award are Professor Dr Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira and Professor Dr Edward Said of Columbia University, for his book on Orientalism.

It was our plan that the President of the Organisation, Mr Abdullah Sharafeddin, will participate in this ceremony and deliver the Certificate personally to Professor Dr Cardoso de Oliveira. However, unfortunately, when he arrived at London from Tripoli, where the head office of the Organisation is located, he fell sick in London and could not continue the journey. Therefore, on behalf of the President of the Organization and in my capacity as its Secretary General, it gives me great pleasure and pride to deliver to Professor Dr Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira the certificate and cheque of the International Award for the Furtherance of Human Understanding in recognition of his outstanding contribution to that cause.

Dr Anis Al-Qasem, LL.M., Ph.D.,
Secretary General,
*International Organisation
for the Elimination of All Forms
of Racial Discrimination*
Brazilia, 5 July 1979

REPLY

SELF-FULFILMENT

The news of the prize which has been awarded to me and which I have the honour of receiving on this occasion, reached me in the middle of April, at the beginning of the Indian week, a period in which we celebrate Indian day, the Indian's struggle and the incredible resistance they offer to all the evils of civilization: a civilization that paradoxically shows to aboriginal populations its predatory face, mainly involved in the appropriation of indigenous lands and, when possible, Indian labour when not involved purely and simply in the elimination of the land's primitive occupants. This scenario, even though permeated by the action of mediating institutions—such as the religious missions (Catholic or Protestant) or the State—has been the main theme of contacts between Indians and whites in Brasil. The history and sociology of these interethnic relations is too well known to require an ampler or more systematic interpretation here. The confrontational theme of these relations is not a privilege of our country, for it is also encountered in other latitudes, other continents; wherever ethnically diverse societies give a monopoly of power, signifying dominium of the state, and supposedly, domination of other less-favoured ethnic groups that come to have status of minorities.

The International Organization For The Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD) exists as the answer to this phenomenon, found in so many places, as much in central countries, as in the third world, notably in the Middle East, in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Naturally it is only one of the possible answers, but not for this the least effective if the oppressed ethnic communities can organize themselves in defence of their civil rights than the more non-conformist, critical and just sectors of the dominant majorities can come to know the moral iniquity with which, by action or inaction, they compromise themselves, the same sectors of the international organizations with identical aims. In the modern world, full of the most varied ethnic conflicts, particularly with the emergence of minorities long thought to have been assimilated by the dominant majorities—as we can well see in the example of some European countries—or in the so called new world with the newly—articulate aboriginal ethnic minorities, and as it is happening now in countries such as the United States and can be seen by movements of the “Redpower” type—it is certain that this struggle for more self-determination by ethnic groups can only turn out well if these three levels of social and political action be joined together: The dominant ethnic groups, the so-called egalitarian sector of the dominant societies and international public opinion.

Cultural pluralism

However, it is with great humility that I receive this “International

Award For The Furtherance of Human Understanding” confident that I represent a part of the Brazilian civil society that holds egalitarian ideals and that, at least in the field of interethnic relations, the right way to attain these ideals is the definitive installation of an unequivocal *cultural pluralism* in Brazil, to see not only the acceptance by society of a pluralist ideology, but the promotion by the state of diversified life-styles, that is different ways of existing, acting and thinking as options as legitimate as those considered expressive of Brazilian modernism, marked and pre-destined for progress. I would like to dwell a little, briefly, on the significance of this cultural pluralism as the aim of an indigenous policy that may take in less the aspirations of the state than those of the Aboriginal Population. In other words, that the state tries to be the interpreter of Ethnic Aboriginal aspirations. Two decades ago we wrote that it would be utopian to consider the indigenous peoples as nations, that is with the same respect and symmetrical treatment that sovereign nations merit; we lamented that the lack of viability of a concept which appeared to us to be morally correct, even knowing the specifications of indigenous nations submitted to the Brazilian state. But today we see that, even though such an aim may be utopian, it does not mean that it should not be adopted as a principle of indigenist policy whose very legitimacy makes it at least worthy of consideration.

Cultural pluralism brings with it, however, a necessity for the self-determination of indigenous nations—without which the acceptance of cultural differentiation is nothing more than the empty words of an indigenist legislation that wants to be just. Here there are two questions which we believe it is opportune to clarify: the first deals with the range of this cultural differentiation, the second with the relation between self-determinism and tutelage. With reference to the first, this is not to accept—that is for Brazilian society to accept—exclusively one sole indigenous mode of existence as something univocal which represents all indigenous nations, distinct from the national mores. We must first recognize the cultural differentiation inside this generic category called “Indian”. It is important to emphasize that this recognition requires the formulation of indigenous policies differentiated both at the regional and the local levels, where the general egalitarian and pluralist principles of a national indigenist policy are present in practical assistance moulded to the needs of this or that indigenous group or nation in particular. This means that without contradicting the democratic postulates of this indigenist policy, the state must recognize the different aboriginal segments under its protection, in their socio-cultural matrix.

Self determination and tutelage

This brings us to the second question, that of how to reconcile self-determination with the statute of tutelage. In current thinking, a result of

the recent civil movement against the emancipation project, this question appears to be crucial. Is there a contradiction in accepting self-determination and repudiating the emancipation project? However this is not the place for a critical evaluation of this project (that has anyway, we believe, been shelved), nor for a discussion of law 6,001 of the 19th of December of 1973, better known as the Indian statute. Nevertheless, an occasion such as this seems to us to be an appropriate place, at least, to touch on the question and affirm—yet again—our position. Didactically there is no contradiction. The Indian's state of tutelage in accord with the guarantees of the statute, constitutes the only way, at the moment, for the state to exercise the protection and assistance that the aboriginal populations enjoy, without threatening the collective ownership and the permanent use of the lands which they occupy. Moreover, law 6,001 in its different parts covers—principally in its references to the protection of rights—all of an ethnic category that at a local level—it is necessary to say—suffers the most violent discrimination that is known in Brazil today, contrary to what occurs in urban areas and in metropolitan centres, where the Indian tends to be seen in a favourable light, in many cases through rose-coloured glasses, it is in these areas of interethnic friction where the Indians live and cohabit with people of a different culture to their own, that we find the most odious manifestations of racial prejudice, of discrimination and, sometimes of segregation. This is the indigenous Brazil that we have studied in these twenty-five years of professional life—it is in these areas of friction, of ethnic conflict that we observe the avarice of the white man for indigenous lands, as well as for the Indians hands ready to be reduced to cheap and docile labour.

In denouncing this state of affairs we are neither alone nor the first; the denunciation is not only from the anthropologists and sertanistas of the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), but is also present in ethnological literature, fertile in illustrations of the process of domination to which the ethnic indigenes have been subjected, transformed into dependant, and in many cases depressed minorities. The description of these processes is, however, well-known and this is not the place to go into them. It appears to us that the most important point is that despite the mediating intervention of the State, through FUNAI, their domination by aliens has not been checked. Even with the law on their side, their statute, in spite of its imperfections—the indigenous population finds almost insuperable obstacles in the way of its full application. Applying it in remote areas in the interior of the country, confronting local and regional interests is not an easy job—principally considering the limited financial resources, and consequently limited human resources of the protective organ. But the Indian statute is here, it is a law within the reach of the state, and as such should be obeyed—as an instrument to fight against iniquity. Meanwhile one has to pay attention that iniquity does not occur under cover of the law. This

brings us to some consideration on the application of tutelage.

Autonomy

How does one apply tutelage? I am convinced that its application must not be made without including in its practice the concept of autonomy. The state must recognise the necessity of continuously and systematically, listening to the aspirations of the indigenous groups under its protection. The statute of tutelage should be applied to minimize to the utmost intervention in tribal life, over all without imposing the parameters of the national life-style with the excuse of civilizing them. In this way, tutelage signifies assuring this autonomy or self-determination, for which the relationship between the State and the Indian communities must be directed to permanent negotiation between FUNAI and the tribal chiefs. Without the implantation of the principle of autonomy, and consequently mechanisms of negotiation, the State runs the risk of turning into an overlord, who decides how best to regulate economic, political or any other matters that have a place in indigenous life. FUNAI must be conscious—for example—of the dangers of installing economic enterprises, projected to increase the sadly famous indigenous patrimony income, and that tend to result in real systems of patronization. This injures directly the most dear traditions of Brazilian indigenism, set for us by Candido Mariano da Silva Rondon. In other words, without associating autonomy and tutelage as two principles of indigenous politics, equally valid and non-contradictory, FUNAI—and through it the State—will differ little from the regional empresarios, neighbours and tribal populations, traditionally and impenitently appropriators of land, goods, and not rarely of the lives on the Indians of this country.

Finally, to say that the indigenous communities should not be able to negotiate with FUNAI over decisions affecting their vital interest would be to close one's eyes to the current situation in indigenous leadership, as is shown by the recent negotiations between the Xavante and the highest authorities of FUNAI over the recuperation of old territories, the insistence of the Xinguans on their right to have a say in the choice of administrators of the Xingu indigenous park, the proliferation of indigenous chiefs assemblies, periodically promoted with the backing of the Missionary Indigenous Council (CIMI) where the most critical questions concerning their survival, including questions that emphasize the defence of their lands and their right to live autonomously following their traditions. Perhaps the most significant phenomenon to appear in the last five years has been the capacity demonstrated by some indigenous groups of defending their interests and organizing themselves into bigger groups, transcending tribal horizons, to construct an organization; that of the Indian—not the general Indian, a stereotype constructed by the white aliens, but of the Brazilian Indian, a sort of identity engendered by the pan-Indianism which appears from the newly-articulate Indian leaderships wherever they exist or come to

exist. In my view the proliferation of these assemblies—a proliferation that should be encouraged not only by CIMI, but also by the State—constitutes a phenomenon of new times, extremely consistent with an open society, where state control is effected mainly by means of liberty of information. These assemblies supply assistance organs, such as FUNAI, with indispensable feedback, the return of information over their own indigenist actions, and certainly the action of the missions, facts without which it would be difficult to practice a healthy indigenism.

Brazilian Indigenism

As a conclusion to what has been said here I would like to extract some theses on Brazilian Indigenism.

First: Official indigenism believes that with the legal emancipation of the Indian he will be liberated from dependance on a tutelage that would, to a certain extent restrain individual and community development. However it does not see that it is falling into the trap of formalism and that tutelage is an instrument of defense for the Indian, perfectly adequate at the present moment in relations between Indians and white in Brazil.

Second: Tutelage, in Indianist policy, has stood for the incompetence of the Indians in resolving their own problems, and has served to transfer them to a state run by civilized people, overlooking the merely strategic character of tutelage and refusing to count on the Indians' competence, at least to realize their hopes and fight for them systematically, as has been shown in tribal and intertribal fields through the indigenous chiefs assemblies.

Third: Basing their decision on the incapacity of the Indian to make decisions acceptable to national society—the reason for their tutelage—the basic unity of FUNAI, its indigenous posts, will not submit their deliberations to indigenous community examination; preferring to act arbitrarily, if not truculently. These indigenists do not perceive that the incapacity of the Indian is relative, if, on the one hand, it blocks the way to a direct and competitive relationship with the farmers, the rubber tappers and other enterprises, on the other hand, it must be admitted that the Indians are perfectly able to negotiate with their protective organ, theoretically capable of clearing the way to an interethnic understanding.

Fourth: Trying to act on the Indian/regional interface FUNAI has tried to eliminate the expeditation of indigenous land and labour, not seeing that in doing this it frequently assumes the role of the alien empresario and patron, simply because it puts the income from the Indian patrimony in first place, substituting for the logic of survival—traditional in tribal communities—the logic of accumulation, inherent in the all-involving capitalist society.

Fifth: Assuming that the Indian can only civilize himself through so-called productive work, FUNAI imposes ideas of development current in modern national society on the indigenous societies. At the same time hoping that the Indians themselves will pay for part of their assistance and

protection through the tite (Dizimo) which is discounted from the exploitation of the indigenous patrimony; those responsible for official indigenism forget that indigenist action, if it is to be free of, and immune from, corruption should not actually have money, particularly when it should fall to the State—and to national society as a whole—to shoulder the financial onus of protection and assistance as they are the ones responsible for the dramatic situation in which the aboriginal population of Brazil finds itself.

Sixth: Considering land as a source of value as much in capital as in national order, the State has not succeeded in taking the indigenous question beyond these limits, neglecting, in this way to consider that land which is indigenous territory, is at once a place of origin, a sacred ground for the burying of the dead, a privileged symbol in tribal identity.

Seventh: In taking on itself the task of making indigenous territories produce by means of development projects, the State did not understand the difficulties encountered in mobilizing the Indian work force effectively, it did not see also, that the Indian, in his own view, felt he was living in an occupied land, occupied by powerful aliens who speak in the name of the great father, the government. Its most noble task is to give him autonomy to create his own destiny, substituting in this way arbitrary administration by the introduction of the diplomatic techniques which apply normally in relations between the State and indigenous communities, until the time comes when we may be led to read the FUNAI as standing for the Foundation of Indigenous Nationalities—this would be the replacement of an internal colonialism by an internal diplomacy.

I want to express my thanks for the distinction that has been given us—to me and to my country—by EAFORD, to its President Mr Abdalla Sharafeddin, its Secretary-General Dr Anis Al-Qasem, here present, hoping they will take my good wishes to the other members of the Executive Council that found me deserving of a prize that so expressively symbolizes the ideas of equality and fraternity of the great majority of the Brazilian people. Without any doubt whatsoever, this recently instituted prize will constitute, as its realizers desire, an effective incentive to the promotion of human understanding, an important part of the world-wide fight for the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination.

Thank you very much.

Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira, M.Phil, Ph.D.,
Professor of Anthropology,
University of Brasilia
Brazilia, 5 July 1979