



NEWS RELEASE

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CROFTERS' INDIGENOUS STATUS REPORT TO BE LAUNCHED

How the United Nations can help promote the distinctive culture of the Scottish Highlands is the subject of a report being launched at the Scottish Parliament next week by the Scottish Crofting Foundation.

Specifically, the report looks at whether crofters can be considered the indigenous people of the Highlands and Islands and what benefits indigenous status would bring to the area.

After generations of summary eviction from their ancestral lands, crofters won the right to live in perpetuity on their crofts in 1886. Administration of the crofting system is carried out by the Crofters Commission, a quango administered by the Scottish Executive and mandated by Scottish Government ministers. The Scottish Crofting Foundation has been examining aspects of United Nations legislation on indigenous peoples to consider how it might apply in a Highland context.

The project researcher, Iain MacKinnon, said: "Under international law crofters have a strong case to be classed as indigenous people and if the United Nations recognise that status, the UK would have to pay attention to the group rights that such classification entails.

"One central plank of the indigenous peoples' movement has been the right to self-determination on issues which relate specifically to their way of life.

"The call by politicians from across the different parties for devolution of power within the Highlands and Islands on regional issues has already raised this issue in a Scottish context and Liberal Democrat MSP John Farquhar Munro's call for a democratically elected Crofters Commission provides an example of how this devolution could begin in practice."

SCF chief executive Patrick Krause said: "This is an exciting development which breaks new ground in our understanding of how crofting and Highland culture in general should be represented – and who should represent it.

"Other historically oppressed groups, such as the Norwegian Sami, have made good use of international law to win a greater say in how their culture is defined within the wider context of their relationship with the nation state that is now their home, and which has also become an important part of their identity.

"I think it is important to stress that the implications of this project are not confined to crofting alone. The Highlands and Islands has rich and varied cultural, musical and linguistic traditions which are more often rooted in crofting and fishing areas.

"The SCF believe that if the bearers of that culture – which is a central part of Scottish cultural identity – are given the opportunity to participate more fully in the determination of its future direction it will help in the revitalisation of the Highlands and Islands – strengthening confidence and belief in this distinctive and valuable way of life."

END

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Notes to editors

Picture can be found at: http://www.croftingfoundation.co.uk/index.php/contact_headoffice