



**INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND THE
UNITED NATIONS FORUM ON FORESTS**

**Remarks presented on behalf of
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To the

Sixth Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

**“Territories, Lands and Natural Resources”
Dialogue with Agencies, Monday 14 May 2007**

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Madame Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Distinguished Elders and Representatives of Indigenous Peoples, Colleagues,

I thank you for the opportunity to share some of the latest developments from the United Nations Forum on Forests. As you know, the UN Forum on Forests is a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and has full membership of all United Nations Member States. It was established by ECOSOC in 2000 to “promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests and to strengthen long-term political commitment to this end”.

As you are well aware, inter-governmental negotiations on issues related to land and natural resources are often quite difficult and the negotiations undertaken in the UN Forum on Forests over the last three years have been no exception. Following particularly difficult negotiations in 2005, subsequent sessions of the Forum have succeeded in creating a stronger overall mandate for the Forum and greater scope for discussion of issues related to Indigenous and Local Communities.

In 2006, the Economic and Social Council added three new principal functions to the work of the Forum, one of which is to encourage and assist countries to increase the area of land under sustainable forest management and reduce forest degradation with a view to enhancing the benefits of forests to meet present and future needs, in particular the needs of Indigenous Peoples and local communities whose livelihoods depend on forests.

This new principal function was also reflected in the four Global Objectives on Forests adopted by the Forum and ECOSOC. The Second Global Objective on Forests reads:

Enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits, including by improving the livelihoods of forest dependent people

Two weeks ago, at its seventh session, the Forum further detailed how Member States and the Forum itself would go about accomplishing these goals. In a landmark decision, Member States adopted a Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests, the first ever inter-governmental instrument on sustainable forest management. The Instrument is expected to be sent through ECOSOC to the General Assembly for adoption at its next session.

The Instrument includes the four previously agreed Global Objectives on Forests and makes several additional references to Indigenous and local communities. In particular:

In reference to National Policies, paragraph 6(f) states that Member States should support the protection and use of traditional forest-related knowledge and practices in sustainable forest management with the approval and the involvement of the holders of such knowledge and promote fair and equitable sharing of benefits out of their utilization, according to national legislation and relevant international agreements;

Paragraph 6(h) states that Member States should create enabling environments for the involvement of Indigenous and local communities in sustainable forest management through a framework of policies, incentives and regulations.

Paragraph 6(s) states that Member States should “promote the development and application of scientific and technological innovations, including those that can be used by forest owners and local and indigenous communities to advance sustainable forest management”.

Paragraph 6(v) states that Member States should “support education, training and extension programmes involving local and indigenous communities, forest workers and forest owners, in order to develop resource management approaches that will reduce the pressure on forests, particularly fragile ecosystems”.

Paragraph 6(y) states that Member States should “Enhance access by households, small scale forest owners, forest dependent local and indigenous communities, living in and outside forest areas, to forest resources and relevant markets in order to support livelihoods and income diversification from forest management, consistent with sustainable forest management”.

Finally, in reference to International Cooperation, paragraph 7(k) states that Member States should “enhance and facilitate access to, and transfer of, appropriate, environmentally sound and innovative technologies and corresponding know how relevant to sustainable forest management and to efficient value added processing of forest products, in particular to developing countries for the benefit of local and indigenous communities”.

Thus, the Instrument reflects substantial recognition and concern for the rights and needs of local and Indigenous communities. A copy of the Instrument is available on the UNFF website.

In addition to the various references related to Indigenous Peoples in the UNFF7 outcome documents, the plenary discussions of the session featured several substantive inputs from the Indigenous Peoples Major Group.

The group submitted a joint discussion paper with Non-Governmental Organizations for the Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue at UNFF7, which was made available to delegates as an official document in all languages. A copy of the discussion paper is available on the UNFF website.

During the first segment of the dialogue with Member States, Indigenous Peoples’ representatives cited international human rights norms and the rights of local forest-dependant peoples, and stressed the need to address underlying causes of forest degradation and promote forest governance. They emphasized the vital role that Indigenous Peoples play in sustainable development, and the cultural and spiritual importance of forests for Indigenous and local communities. The second segment of the Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue was moderated by a representative from the Indigenous Peoples’ Major group, and one of the three key themes of discussion focused on participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. During the

discussion, Indigenous Peoples' representatives pointed out that many indigenous groups are complex nations with a distinct legal status, and that the close inter-connection between Indigenous communities and their natural environments transcends issues of subsistence.

In addition to the Instrument, the Forum also adopted a multi-year programme of work that will guide the deliberations of the Forum until the year 2015. Each biennial session, from now until 2015, will consider implementation of the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests as well as the four Global Objectives on Forests in addition to implementation of sustainable forest management and previous UNFF decisions and resolutions and IPF/IFF proposals for action.

In addition, Member States also decided to appoint themes for each of the future UNFF sessions.

The next session of the Forum, which will take place in 2009, will have the theme Forests in a Changing Environment and will address three major issues:

- forests and climate change;
- combating the loss of forest cover, forest degradation and desertification; and
- forests and biodiversity conservation, including protected areas.

In addition to these three issues, the Forum will also address means of implementation and a possible financial mechanism as well as forest related law enforcement and governance at this session.

At the ninth session, in 2011, the Forum will focus on the theme Forests for People, Livelihoods and Poverty Alleviation and will address:

- community based forest management;
- social development and forest dependant indigenous and other local communities, including land tenure; and
- social and cultural aspects of forests.

As you know, the General Assembly has also decided that 2011 will be the International Year for Forests and the UN Forum on Forests will include celebrations of the year at this session. A mid-term review will also take place in 2011.

In 2013, the Forum will discuss Forests and Economic Development, and in 2015, it will undertake a comprehensive review of its work. A full description of the multi-year programme of work for the Forum is available on the UNFF website.

Madame Chairperson,

There has always been a very strong role for Indigenous Peoples in the work of the UN Forum on Forests. We believe implementation of the new Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests will only be successful if it is undertaken in partnership with Indigenous Peoples at the national and local levels. We would encourage members of the Permanent Forum to engage with their national governments to ensure that the commitment to sustainable forest management is upheld at all levels.

In considering future modalities of work, Member States emphasized the importance of engagement of a wide spectrum of stakeholders and placed particular importance on receiving input from regional bodies and processes. Participation of Indigenous Peoples in regional inter-governmental discussions will thus also provide an important component of substantive contribution and engagement.

At the same time, the multi-year programme of work and the celebration of the International Year for Forests provide a very clear opportunity for Indigenous Peoples to contribute actively to inter-governmental deliberations at the global level. In the past, Indigenous Peoples have held expert meetings or organization led initiatives in advance of UNFF sessions, to provide a substantive input to the deliberations. Such initiatives have always been welcomed by Member States and we hope they will continue. The Forum seeks active involvement of Indigenous

Peoples by providing space for engagement throughout the session and we expect these opportunities to grow in future sessions.

We at the UN Forum on Forests Secretariat would like to extend an open invitation to this Forum and its members to develop a stronger partnership with us that will ensure continued and growing substantive collaboration. Indigenous Peoples have a tremendous amount of traditional knowledge and practical experience to contribute to the discussions of the UN Forum on Forests and we hope that you will join us in ensuring that our forests are well managed and preserved for generations to come.

Thank you.