



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES INDIGENOUS VOICES

PRESS RELEASE

Indigenous peoples' rights to lands, territories and natural resources focus of UN forum opening 14 May in New York

*Other key issues include urban indigenous peoples and migration; indigenous peoples in Asia;
and data collection and disaggregation.*

(New York, 10 May) More than one thousand indigenous representatives from all regions of the world will converge on the United Nations next week to engage with government representatives, senior UN officials, civil society and academia to state their views, voice their concerns and suggest solutions regarding lands, territories and natural resources. The Sixth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues will be held in New York from 14 to 25 May.

This year's theme goes right to the heart of indigenous peoples' efforts to gain recognition for their rights.

"With the increasing desire of states for more economic growth, senseless exploitation of indigenous peoples' territories and resources continues unabated," said Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Chairperson of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

She further stated that the majority of the world's remaining natural resources – minerals, freshwater, potential energy sources and more - are found within indigenous peoples' territories. Access to and ownership and development of these resources remains a contentious issue.


Although in recent decades some progress has been made in the area of legal recognition of indigenous peoples' rights to the protection and control of their lands, territories and natural resources, in practical terms this recognition has not always translated into reality. Threats to indigenous peoples' lands and territories include such things as mineral extraction, logging, environmental contamination, privatization and development projects, the classification of lands as protected areas or game reserves, the use of genetically modified seeds and technology and monoculture cash crop production.

In addition to discussions on the main theme, the Forum session will also include a half-day discussion on Urban Indigenous and Migration. While the majority of indigenous peoples worldwide still live in rural areas, they are increasingly migrating to urban areas, both voluntarily and involuntarily. Common factors that lead to the movement of indigenous peoples from their lands and territories include poverty, environmental factors, conflict, inadequate legal protection over lands and resources, and the absence of services. They are also motivated by opportunities for improved employment, health, housing, education, political participation, social recognition and visibility or other benefits that they may lack in their territories.

"The impacts of urban areas on indigenous peoples vary greatly. Some are able to adapt and improve their situations considerably without loss of cultural identity; in other cases, indigenous peoples are subject to discrimination, exclusion and violence," said Elissavet Stamatopoulou, Chief of the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.



United Nations



“The UN Permanent Forum is a unique venue where indigenous peoples’ concerns can be heard and discussed with governments, the UN and civil society,” she continued.

The two-week Forum will also focus its discussion on indigenous peoples in Asia; status of implementation of recommendations from previous sessions in the areas of economic and social development, environment, health, education, culture and human rights; and the Millennium Development Goals. Reports of three regional meetings from Africa, Asia and Latin America on Indigenous Peoples and Indicators of Well-being will be discussed.

Indigenous peoples at the international level

Estimates point to more than 370 million indigenous peoples in some 70 countries worldwide. While they are from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds, they share commonalities such as: lack of basic healthcare; limited access to education; loss of control over land; abject poverty; displacement; human rights violations; and economic and social marginalization.

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was established by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July 2000. The Forum was called upon to provide expert advice and recommendations on indigenous issues to the UN system through the Council; raise awareness and promote the integration and coordination of relevant activities within the UN system; and disseminate information on indigenous issues.

The Permanent Forum is comprised of sixteen independent experts, functioning in their personal capacity. The Economic and Social Council appoints the members, eight of whom are nominated by governments and eight nominated directly by indigenous organizations in their regions.

Efforts to highlight indigenous issues at an international, inter-governmental level started in 1923 when Chief Deskaheh of the Cayuga Nation went to Geneva to speak to the League of Nations and defend the right of his nation to live on their land under their own laws and faith. Maori Leader Ratana made the same journey to Geneva in 1924 to plead the case of his peoples. Even though they were not allowed to speak at the League of Nations, their vision nourished the generations that followed.

The participation of indigenous peoples in discussions and programmes that impact on them is a top priority of the Permanent Forum. A Trust Fund for the Second International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People has been established to fund small grants projects that focus on culture, education, health, human rights, the environment and social and economic development by and for indigenous peoples. For more information on the Fund, visit: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/second_trustfund.html

An indigenous exhibit to coincide with the session will be inaugurated at 6.15 p.m. on 15 May in the Visitor’s Lobby of the United Nations.

Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Chairperson of the UNPFII,
Ms. Ida Nicolaisen and Mr. Hassan Id Balkassm, members of the Permanent Forum,
will hold a press conference in Room S-226
on Monday 14 May at 1:15p.m.

For more information on the Sixth Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, please see:
http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/session_sixth.html

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