

**June 2012**

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The Message Stick<sup>1</sup> highlights the activities of the  
United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous  
Issues (UNPFII).  
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Mr. Cameron McCarthy performs at the opening ceremony. Photo credit: Grand Chief Ed John

<sup>1</sup> A Message Stick is a traditional Australian Aboriginal method of correspondence whereby runners would deliver messages carved in symbols on a piece of wood to inform other indigenous peoples of upcoming events.

**Eleventh Session of the United Nations  
Permanent forum on Indigenous Issues**



Indigenous elders at the Opening of the Eleventh Session of the UNPFII Photo credit: Grand Chief Ed John

***Opening Session***

The eleventh session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues took place at UN Headquarters in New York from 7 to 18 May 2012. Around one thousand participants attended the session representing governments, indigenous peoples' organizations, UN-system agencies, NGOs and academic institutions.

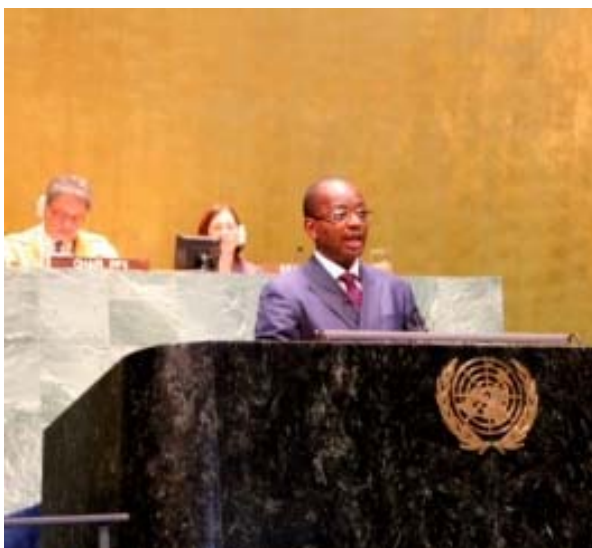
At the opening session, Mr. Cameron McCarthy performed the ceremonial sounds of a traditional indigenous instrument from Australia (the didgeridoo). Traditional Chief of the Onondaga Nation, Todadaho Sid Hill, extended a ceremonial welcome to the lands of his ancestors.

The session set the tone for the Eleventh Session with the Deputy Secretary-General Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro describing the Forum as *“uniting different voices and different languages in one single*



*demand: recognizing, respecting and promoting indigenous people's rights".* She highlighted the 16-member expert body's catalytic role in helping indigenous peoples worldwide achieve their goals and the right to self-determination, working alongside UN agencies and civil society groups.

The Permanent Forum elected Mr. Edward John as Chair of the eleventh session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues by acclamation.



Minister of the Communication and Relations with Parliament of the Republic of Congo delivers keynote address. Photo credit: Grand Chief Ed John

At the opening ceremony, the Minister of Communication and Relations with Parliament from the Republic of Congo H.E. Mr. Bienvenu Okiemy, delivered the keynote address on his country's leadership role in spearheading indigenous rights in Africa. His country recently adopted "Law No. 5-2011 On the Promotion and Protection of Indigenous Populations". He also noted that Congo is working to improve access to social services and education, which should be adapted to the ways of life of indigenous peoples.

Mayan Elders Virginia Ajxup and Juan Sapil offered ceremonial prayers for the Eleventh Session.

### ***Discussion on the Special Theme***

The theme for the eleventh session was on "The Doctrine of Discovery: its enduring impact on indigenous peoples and the right to redress for past conquests (articles 28 and 37 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples)." Speakers, highlighted the continuing and pervasive impact of the Doctrine, and how it has been used as a tool of extinguishment, under which the colonizing State sought to abolish indigenous peoples, their languages, and existence, by recognizing some peoples and not others. Ms Fernanda Espinoza, Minister of Heritage of Ecuador, noted that the Ecuadoran Constitution sought to better harmonize the needs of humankind, nature and the State and focused attention on the Ecuadorian principle of "living well" as an alternative to conventional development based on Western models.

Speakers highlighted examples on the practice in different parts of the world including in Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe, on steps taken through formal acknowledgements and apologies to redress past injustices, and the process of defining new relationships between the Government and indigenous peoples.

### ***Human Rights***

On human rights, during an interactive dialogue, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Professor James Anaya, reported on the continuing discrimination against indigenous peoples and on their marginalization and invisibility in the political, economic and social spheres.





## ***Violence against Indigenous Women and Girls***

The Forum also focused on Violence against Indigenous Women and Girls, building on the outcome of the January expert group meeting. There was lively debate and discussion among Member-states, UN agencies including UN Women, UNFPA, UNICEF, as well as IPOs emphasizing the different dimensions and the need to continue efforts towards its elimination.



Participant at 11th Session of the UNPFII  
Photo credit: Grand Chief Ed John

## ***Central and Eastern Europe, the Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia***

This year, the regional focus of the Forum was on Central and Eastern Europe, the Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia. Experts and speakers described the region's ethnic and cultural diversity, and the threats to its fragile natural ecosystems — along with the reindeer herding and other traditional livelihoods they supported. While there has been some

economic progress, indigenous peoples' lands, languages and cultural heritage remain vulnerable.

## ***Interactive Dialogue with WIPO***

The interactive dialogue with WIPO was lively, with speakers calling for greater recognition of indigenous peoples in its decision-making processes and to respect their right to safeguard, preserve or promote traditional resources according to their rights and priorities. WIPO's Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore is engaged in a process of elaborating an international legal instrument regarding traditional knowledge, genetic resources and traditional cultural expressions, which will be considered in 2013.

## ***Right to Food and Food Sovereignty***

The half-day on the Right to Food and Food Sovereignty of Indigenous peoples included a panel with the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food security, the Food and Agriculture Organization, indigenous peoples' representatives from Africa and Asia, and the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the UN. A study on shifting cultivation and the socio-cultural integrity of indigenous peoples, conducted by three members of the Forum, was also presented.

## ***World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (2014)***

In the context of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (2014), the President of the General Assembly has appointed two facilitators - the Permanent Representative of Mexico and the international representative of the Saami Parliament of Norway to conduct consultations on this behalf. Together with the Office of the PGA, the facilitators conducted an open discussion on



the modalities, preparatory process and outcome of the World Conference. The key question will focus on the ways and means to secure indigenous participation at all steps of the Conference. The Permanent Forum adopted seventeen recommendations on the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

### ***5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples***

Following a formal decision of the General Assembly (A/Res/66/142) “to carry out activities focused on marking the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration”, a commemoration was convened on 17 May by the Secretary-General within the framework of the PFII. Statements were made by the Secretary-General (via video); the President of the General Assembly; the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights; the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, H.E. Mr. David Choquehuanca; the Chair of the Permanent Forum; the Former Chair of the Working Group on a UN draft declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples; the Chair of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples; representatives of Australia, Ecuador, Denmark, El Salvador, Finland, Germany, Mexico, Nicaragua, Norway, Sweden, the USA and the EU; representatives of regional Indigenous Peoples’ caucuses, the Indigenous Women’s and Youth caucus.

A statement delivered on behalf of the President of Slovenia, a former member of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, called the UN Declaration a “living document” and noted that its adoption in 2007 signified an important landmark in the struggle for human rights and

improvement in the lives of indigenous peoples.

### ***Reports and Studies***

Several reports and studies undertaken by Permanent Forum members were submitted to the session that highlight indigenous peoples’ realities, including:

- Report of the international expert group meeting: combating violence against indigenous women and girls
- Study on shifting cultivation and the sociocultural integrity of indigenous peoples
- Study on the impacts of land use change and climate change on indigenous reindeer herders’ livelihoods and land management, including culturally adjusted criteria for indigenous land uses
- Study on Indigenous participatory mechanisms in the Arctic Council, the Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Resource Development Principles in Inuit Nunaat and the Laponia management system
- An analysis on the duty of the State to protect indigenous peoples affected by transnational corporations and other business enterprises

### ***Participation***

The session was widely attended by some 60-70 member states, over 1200 indigenous peoples’ representatives, UN system agencies, funds and programmes and NGOs. There is an increasing number of high level government ministers attending the session, indicating the importance placed on the issue.

\* The Report of the Eleventh Session is available on the website of the Secretariat of the UNPFII in six languages.







Pampa Mesa created by Inty M. Photo credit: Jan Arnesen

### ***Cultural Event and Exhibition***

The opening of the exhibit, “Indigenous Peoples and Food Sovereignty,” and a cultural event took place on Tuesday 8 May, in the Visitors’ Lobby of the UN. The event commenced with a sacred community ritual typical of the Andean region called “pampa mesa” (community meal) led by Inti Muenala. Grand Chief Ed John, Chair of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and Ms. Jane Fletcher, Deputy Director at the New Zealand Office of Treaty Settlements, delivered opening remarks. In his speech, Grand Chief Ed John noted that the exhibition showcased “the importance of food sovereignty in the maintenance of our health, traditions, cultural identities, and our rights as indigenous peoples”.

The programme included music and performances by Sak Tzevul (Mexico), Kahurangi Performing Arts Theatre (New Zealand), Sherpa and Tamang indigenous peoples (Nepal), Elleyada (Republic of Sakha, Russian Federation), and the Chakma people (Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh), Masaai from Kenya, and Andes Manta (Ecuador).

The event was organized by the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, together with the Department of Public Information and the NGO Committee on the

International Decade of the World’s Indigenous Peoples. The sponsors that contributed to the event were the Permanent Missions of New Zealand, Bolivia, Finland, and Norway, as well as the Maryknoll Office for Global Concern, the Royal Norwegian Consulate General, Passionists International, Sunray Meditation Society and the Salvation Army.



Chakma Dance, Cultural Event , UNPFII 2012  
Photo Credit: Grand Chief Ed John

### ***Side Events***

More than 50 side events took place during the two-week session, organized by Member States, UN entities, other intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum and other stakeholders. The events covered a wide range of topics from extractive industries to indigenous women’s rights and from governance issues to disability rights.

### **G20: Meeting with Civil Society- San Jose del Cabo, Mexico**

Permanent Forum Members Dalee Sambo Dorough and Saul Vicente attended the pre-session G20 meeting with civil society hosted by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, and Economy of the Government of Mexico in June 2012. At this event, representatives of civil society organizations and coalitions addressed the Mexican Presidency of the Group of Twenty



(G20) to present their recommendations for the Leaders' Summit.

Following an opening statement delivered by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ms Dorough was one of five people to make an intervention. She noted that Indigenous peoples are unique from other members of "civil society" due their inherent legal status, pre-existing rights, and collective human rights, in particular those that relate to self-determination and lands, territories and resources. She emphasized how the UNDRIP affirms that Indigenous peoples have the right to determine their own priorities for development, and that the term "development" must be understood to include not only economic development but also political, social, cultural and spiritual development. In order to enhance effective implementation of the UNDRIP in the G20 context, she concluded by recommending that Indigenous peoples and their fundamental human rights become a permanent agenda item of the G20.

### **UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20)**

Members of UN the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, including Grand Chief Ed John, Myrna Cunningham Kain, Raja Devasish Roy and Valmaine Tok, attended the UN Conference on Sustainable Development participating in side-events and roundtables discussion.

Grand Chief Ed John moderated a session convened by the UN Global Compact on "Business engagement with Indigenous Peoples". After he opened the session by highlighting indigenous peoples' expectations of business, companies participating in the Global Compact LEAD-Human Rights Taskforce presented their approach and best practices. Then the Taskforce shared its findings from research and mapping of

international standards on business engagement with indigenous peoples and discussed the development of a more coherent and concrete vision of business' role in the realization of the rights of indigenous peoples.

Members of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues also attended the Peoples' International Conference on Sustainable Development & Self-Determination held at the Museo de Republica, in Rio de Janeiro, 17-19 June, 2012. The meeting resulted in a Declaration endorsed by indigenous peoples' representatives from all major regions of the world.

In the working group deliberations prior to the adoption of the Declaration, Mr. Roy delivered a presentation and facilitated a session on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The working group discussion fed into the final Declaration of 19 June, 2012. He also participated in the women's demonstration along side Asian Indigenous Women's representatives and a Roundtable discussion on "Aiming for a Food Secure Future", co-organized by IFAD, FAO and Biodiversity International.

### **Other Activities of Members of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

Alvaro Pop attended an Inter-Agency meeting on interculturality and indigenous peoples in Latin America on 27 and 28 June in Lima, Peru

