



Special Edition 2012



(L-R) Bertie Xavier, Raja Devasish Roy, Viktoria Tuulas, Paimaneh Hasteh.

Photo Credit: UNIC Guatemala

Towards a New Era: Message by Grand Chief Edward John, Chair of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

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In addition to an end-of-the-year message from the Chair of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, this special edition of Message Stick¹ highlights a recent meeting in Guatemala in preparation for the World Conference on Indigenous Issues (2014). Also included are some of the major international events concerning indigenous peoples in 2013, and a story of a young indigenous film-maker who brought his voice from the Brazilian Amazon to New York.



(L-R) Paimaneh Hasteh, Anna Naykanchina, Wilton Littlechild, Edward John, Alvaro Pop, Valmaine Toki.

Photo Credit: UNIC Guatemala

¹ 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.





Dawn of a new era: Tikal, Guatemala
Photo Credit: Valmaine Toki

**Towards a New Era: End-of –Year
Message by Grand Chief Edward John,
Chair of the UN Permanent Forum on
Indigenous Issues**

As I write this holiday message, I think back over the past year and the events I attended in pursuit of justice for indigenous peoples. Injustices and human rights violations occur on a daily basis, even in my own country of Canada, where we continue to struggle for our rights. In fact one of our elected Chiefs, Teresa Spence, is now in her 18th day of a hunger strike over the social and economic conditions in indigenous communities across Canada. The underlying message is clear – there is no time for complacency, we have to work even harder. We must never give up hope.

Just this past week, I along with the Permanent Forum members, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous

Peoples and Experts from the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, together with Secretariat staff, attended sessions in Guatemala City and also in Tikal, Guatemala. The invitation from the Government of Guatemala – and with the support of the UN Country Team in Guatemala and their partners provided us an important opportunity to commemorate the Oxlajuj B’aqtun – the dawn of a new era, the 14th B’aqtun according to the incredible Mayan calendar; and help us prepare for the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in 2014. The week was demanding but at the same time very moving and inspiring.

It has also been an excellent opportunity for the three UN mechanisms (the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues) working on indigenous issues to meet with indigenous peoples’ organizations, civil society and government representatives. The meeting served as an important reminder of the progress underway and what needs to be done to reach our goals and make the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples a reality for indigenous peoples around the world.

This year, the Permanent Forum held its eleventh session. With more than a decade of experience, it has seen the rights of indigenous peoples being increasingly recognized within the international community. However, there is still a long way to go for indigenous peoples’ full and effective participation in matters that concern them.

The theme of the eleventh session – “*Doctrine of Discovery: its enduring impact on indigenous peoples and the right to redress for past conquests*” reflects the situation of indigenous peoples around the



world. Many States are now revising their constitutional provisions concerning indigenous peoples, including the right to redress and remediation for violations of indigenous peoples' rights. States that have made formal acknowledgements and apologies to redress past injustices are now in the process of defining new relationships between the Government and indigenous peoples. While wide social disparities continue to face indigenous peoples, these steps, while small, are important relationship building blocks and need to be acknowledged.

The Permanent Forum continues to work with the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and he continues to report on the prevailing discrimination against indigenous peoples and their near invisibility in the political, economic and social spheres of the States in which they live. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has provided a new basis for understanding the status and rights of indigenous peoples, and it continues to be the catalyst for change in ensuring the standards of indigenous peoples' rights are being met.

I am also very concerned about violence against indigenous women and girls. In January 2012, the Permanent Forum held an expert group meeting titled: *Combating violence against indigenous women and girls: article 22 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. This important issue was discussed among member-states, UN agencies including UN Women, as well as indigenous peoples' organizations emphasizing the different dimensions and the need to continue efforts towards its elimination.

During the Permanent Forum's eleventh session, there was the regional focus 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 reindeer herding and other traditional livelihoods. While there has been some economic progress, indigenous peoples' lands, languages and cultural heritage remain vulnerable.

United Nations agencies continue to play an important role in the work of the Permanent Forum. During the Permanent Forum's session there was an interactive dialogue with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) where speaker after speaker called for greater recognition of indigenous peoples in WIPO's 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.

The Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples Issues held their annual meeting in November hosted by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. It was very well organized, and I was very impressed with the work of many UN Agencies in trying to make a difference to the lives of indigenous peoples. The Permanent Forum will continue to work with, and support UN Agencies as they work hard to implement the Forum's recommendations.

Let me turn to the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples which will be held in 2014. The President of the General Assembly has appointed two facilitators: the Permanent Representative of Mexico, Ambassador de Alba and an indigenous representative of the Saami Parliament of Norway, Mr. John B. Henriksen to conduct consultations. Together with the Office of the President of the



General Assembly, the facilitators conducted an open discussion on the modalities, the preparatory process and outcome of the World Conference. A Resolution on the Modalities of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples was passed by the General Assembly in September 2012. Amid deep scepticism about the level of State commitments, indigenous peoples are preparing for this conference. Meetings already been held in Africa, Arctic and Asia. As part of the twelfth session, the Permanent Forum will continue to work towards the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in 2014 and request States and UN Agencies to actively engage with, and support indigenous peoples in the preparation process of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. A milestone in 2012 was the anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Five years have past since its adoption where we – through persistence and collaboration – gained a new international standard for the continued survival of indigenous peoples, the protection of their rights, dignity and well-being.



Dawn of a new era: Tikal, Guatemala
Photo Credit: Valmaine Toki

As an international human rights instrument, the UN Declaration forms the pillar of the Permanent Forum’s work and guides our activities. We cannot afford to divert from our continued efforts to address the gaps of the implementation of the UN Declaration.

We need to make sure there is a real difference on the ground for indigenous peoples.

In this spirit, I would like call on indigenous peoples, States and UN agencies to collaborate and re-affirm their commitments towards attaining the rights of indigenous peoples in all its activities in 2013 and beyond.

In closing, I would like wish you all Happy Holidays and a happy new B’aqtun. Thank you for your support over the past year. May our ancestors guide us well into the New Year.

Chief Edward John

Meeting of the three United Nations Mechanisms on Indigenous Peoples in Guatemala to discuss the preparations for the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples



Back row (L-R) Raja Devasish Roy, Paimaneh Hasteh, Simon M’Viboudoulou, Viktoria Tuulas, HE Luis Alfonso de Alba (Permanent Representative of Mexico), Alvarao Pop. Front row (L-R) Anna Naykanchina, Saúl Vicente Vázquez, Wilton Littlechild, Edward John, James Anaya, Mirna Cunningham Kain, Bertie Xavier.
Photo Credit: UNIC Guatemala

To celebrate the commemoration of the Oxlajuj B’aqtun, a new era for the Maya people and the world, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous



Peoples and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples met in Guatemala, in preparation for the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in 2014. His Excellency, Ambassador Luis Alfonso de Alba also participated in the discussions, in his capacity as co-facilitator for the World Conference.²

During the event, they met with the President of Guatemala, ministers and other high level officials, indigenous peoples' organizations, donors and partners, the UN Country Team in Guatemala, and civil society. Indigenous peoples' expressed concerns about a range of issues including human rights violations, proposed legislation on rural development and telecommunications, and the need for the full and effective implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights Indigenous Peoples and other international standards including ILO Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples.

The meeting was organized by the United Nations System in Guatemala, with support from other partners.

More information about the meeting is available at (in Spanish):
www.onu.org.gt/contenido.php?ntc=409-1348-noticias

Indigenous Voices on the World Conference on Indigenous Issues: Regional Preparatory Meetings

In preparation for the World Conference on Indigenous Issues in 2014, regions and caucuses are meeting and maintaining listservs.

² The President of the 66th Session of the UN General Assembly appointed H. E. Luis Alfonso de Alba, Permanent Representative of Mexico and Mr. John B. Henriksen, international representative of the Sami Parliament of Norway to facilitate the modalities and arrangements for the World Conference, including the substantive participation of indigenous peoples.

An overview of each region, including links to the listservs, is available at www.un.org/indigenous.

The Indigenous Global Coordinating Group (GCG) is tasked with the coordination of indigenous peoples participation at all levels leading up to and including the United Nations World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.



Dawn of a new era: Tikal, Guatemala
Photo Credit: Valmaine Toki

Forthcoming International Expert Group Meeting: Indigenous Youth: Identity, Challenges and Hope: Articles 14, 17, 21 and 25 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (29 – 31 January 2013)

The Permanent Forum is holding the first international expert group meeting (EGM) on indigenous youth from 29 to 31 January 2013 on the theme: “Indigenous youth: Identity, Challenges and Hope: Articles 14, 17, 21 and 25 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”.

The Expert Group Meeting is intended to:

- Analyze enshrined human rights within international standards and policies and how these could be more responsive to advancing the rights of indigenous youth;



- Promote an opportunity to exchange information and analysis on the social and economic conditions of indigenous youth, including the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health, social security, among others;
- Identify options and further plans to build the necessary conditions for developing strategies to protect economic and social rights of indigenous youth including empowering, strengthening indigenous youth organizations and other capacity enhancement programs for indigenous youth.

The final report and recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting will be submitted to the twelfth session of the Permanent Forum in May 2013.

Representatives from indigenous peoples' organizations and non-governmental organizations who are interested in attending the meeting are advised to contact Mr. Broddi Sigurdarson (sigurdarson@un.org).

More information about the event is available at www.un.org/indigenous.

Forthcoming Twelfth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (20 – 31 May 2013) – Special Theme: Review Year

The twelfth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues will take place from 20 to 31 May 2012 at UN Headquarters in New York.

The twelfth session will be significant because this is the Permanent Forum's review year and there will be special emphasis on the Permanent Forum's recommendation in the areas of health,

education and culture. The provisional agenda includes:

1. Election of Officers.
2. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.
3. Follow-up on the recommendations of the Permanent Forum:
 - a. Health;
 - b. Education;
 - c. Culture.
4. Half-day discussion on the African region.
5. Comprehensive dialogue with United Nations agencies and funds.
6. Discussion on the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.
7. Human rights:
 - a. Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
 - b. Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples and the Chair of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
8. Future work of the Permanent Forum, including issues of the Economic and Social Council and emerging issues.
9. Draft agenda for the thirteenth session of the Permanent Forum.
10. Adoption of the report of the Permanent Forum on its twelfth session.

More information on the twelfth session, including pre-registration, will be made available in due course on our website: www.un.org/indigenous.



From the Brazilian Amazon to New York: Indigenous Filmmaker with an Important Message



On 7 December 2012, Nilson Tuwe Huni Kuĩ, an indigenous young leader and filmmaker from the Western Amazon in Brazil, shared his experiences and vision for the future.

“I am coming straight from the forest to New York with a very important goal”, said Nilson Tuwe Huni Kuĩ, representing the Huni Kuĩ Kaxinawá peoples of the Acre State in the Brazilian Amazon, as he shared his experiences advocating for the rights of the Kaxinawá peoples. “We are working for our empowerment, our autonomy,” he said.

Tuwe is the President of the Association of the Indigenous Peoples of the Humaita River – ASPIRH, a filmmaker, and an indigenous agro-forestry agent. But above all, Tuwe is a spokesperson and a messenger for his people. His work as an advocate and filmmaker intends to raise awareness on the situation of indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation in the Amazon.

During an event on 7 December 2012, hosted by the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Tuwe also highlighted how his community uses its natural resources with future generations in mind. “We are using the resources in a sustainable way, thinking about guaranteeing the future of the generations to come,” he said.

He also described how wealth is looked upon differently within his community. There is an appreciation for nature, biodiversity, quality life and living in harmony with nature. “But above all is to have the freedom to do what you want. That is the true wealth for us,” Tuwe explained.

With determination to learn English to be able to convey the important message of his people, and to improve his skills as a filmmaker, Tuwe came to New York in September as the 2012 recipient of Tribal Link’s Indigenous Fellowship. The importance of communication skills is to be able to carry out political advocacy, promoting the rights of indigenous peoples at national and international levels, was also something Tuwe highlighted during the event.³

Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

The Secretariat of the Permanent Forum was established by the General Assembly in 2002.

It is based at UN Headquarters in New York in the Division for Social Policy and Development of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DSPD/DESA).

The Secretariat is now located in the Secretariat Building, Room S-2954

³ DESA News

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