



November 2011

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The Message Stick ¹ highlights the activities undertaken by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and its Secretariat. It is produced by SPFII staff.



UN Permanent Forum member, Mr. Simon M'Viboudoulou (left), representatives from UN system, indigenous organization and NGO, at a talk show organized as part of the celebration in Congo for the International Day for Indigenous Peoples.

Photo Credit: Simon M'Viboudoulou

International Day of Indigenous Peoples

UN Permanent Forum member, Mr. Simon M'Viboudoulou participated in activities organized by the Government of the Republic of Congo as part of the country's celebration of the International Day of Indigenous Peoples, on 5th August. Mr. M'Viboudoulou joined representatives from UN agencies, indigenous communities and NGOs in a round-table discussion, talk show and also a visit to a remote indigenous community outside of Brazzaville, Congo.

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.





UN Permanent Forum member, Mr. Simon M'Viboudoulou, crossing the Likouala River, on his way to Mbomo Village, Congo.

Photo Credit: Simon M'Viboudoulou

6th Northern Research Forum Open Assembly

UN Permanent Forum member, Ms. Dalee Sambo Dorough was the keynote speaker at the 6th Northern Research Forum Open Assembly titled “Our Ice Dependent World” which was held in Hverageroi, Iceland from 4th – 6th September. She presented a paper on the inter-related implications of ice melt for indigenous peoples. The objective of the Forum was to address the impact of dwindling ice – terrestrial (the Arctic, the Himalayans and Antarctica) as well as ocean bound - on the complex interface of nature and society in all climatic zones of the world.



UN Permanent Forum member, Ms. Dalee S. Dorough with President Olafur Ragnar Grimsson of Iceland and Mr. Luke Dorough

Photo Credit: Dalee Sambro Dorough

Expert Meeting on Greening the Economy with Agriculture (GEA)

Ms. Myrna Cunningham Kain, Chairperson of the UN Permanent Forum attended the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) expert meeting in Paris, from 5th – 7th September. The expert meeting was organized in collaboration with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The purpose of this meeting was to technically review the GEA documents under preparation, through discussions and individual expert perspectives.

Enabling Economic Empowerment for Rural Women

Ms. Myrna Cunningham Kain, Chairperson of the UN Permanent Forum, participated in the expert group meeting titled: Enabling rural women’s economic empowerment: institutions, opportunities and participation, in Accra, Ghana, 20th – 23rd September.

Ms. Cunningham spoke on the role of institutions in rural areas addressing women’s needs, with a focus on indigenous women. She highlighted some of the demands and experiences of rural indigenous women; in particular, their experiences as a result of institutional policies directed towards them, as well as participatory strategies and proposals promoted by indigenous women within their own organizations to improve conditions in rural areas.



Photo credit: UN Women



UN Country Team Training in Argentina

The Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (SPFII) organized a workshop, from 12 – 13th October, in Buenos Aires, Argentina as part of the ongoing efforts to train UN Country Teams on the integration of indigenous peoples' issues into country policies and programmes.

The following UN agencies participated at the workshop: United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Women and Pan-American Health Organization.

UN Special Rapporteur - Report on the Impact of Extractive Industries on Indigenous Peoples

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Professor James Anaya presented his third annual report to the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) of the UN General Assembly in New York on 17 October.

In his report, the Special Rapporteur addressed the topic of extractive industries, pointing out the negative and even catastrophic effects these activities have had on the rights of indigenous peoples, and the need to facilitate a common understanding among indigenous peoples, governments and private companies about the key issues and applicable human rights standards in this context. He stated that this issue will be a major focus of his work during the next three years of his mandate.

Handbook for Parliamentarians on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

Ms. Myrna Cunningham Kain, Chairperson of the UN Permanent Forum and other members of the editorial board, staff of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Development Programme, Inter-Parliamentary Union, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (SPFII) met in New York, 25th – 26th October, to discuss the draft Handbook for Parliamentarians on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

This handbook will serve as a guide for Parliamentarians to promote the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in parliaments.

Policy Board Meeting of the United Nations Indigenous Peoples Partnership (UNIPP)

The United Nations Indigenous Peoples Partnership (UNIPP) held its second policy board meeting in New York from 27 – 28th October to review and approve proposals for the UN country programs designed in partnership with indigenous peoples.

UN Permanent Forum member and co-chair of UNIPP, Mr. Devasish Roy and other indigenous experts including Mr. Adelfo Regino Montes (Secretary of Indigenous Affairs, Government of Oaxaca, Mexico) and Ms. Angela Riley (Director of American Indian Studies Center and Professor of Law at the University of California, Los Angeles and Chief of the Supreme Court of the Citizen Potawatomi Nations, USA) actively participated in this meeting. Mr. Roy emphasized that the proposals were reviewed



while keeping in mind the role of indigenous peoples in the design, implementation and evaluation of the joint programs.

Staff and senior representatives from UN agencies were also present, as well high level government officials from Denmark and Finland who participated as donors and observers.

UN Permanent Forum Chairperson, Ms. Myrna Cunningham Kain was also present and expressed her appreciation for senior level UN representation at the board meeting, as it demonstrated a serious commitment from UN agencies. She further stated that she is counting on UNIPP to facilitate the implementation of UN Permanent Forum recommendations to UN Country Teams and encouraged the Partnership to consider priorities in view of the regional and global initiatives such as the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.



Photo Credit: UNIPP Secretariat and supporting UN Agencies

UNESCO Indigenous Peoples Policy

As part of its celebration of World Science Day 2011 for Peace and Development, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) organized a side-event on 10 November on the theme: Knowledge Systems, Knowledge Diversity, Knowledge Society: Towards a UNESCO

Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples, with the goal to create awareness and support for its indigenous peoples' policy development process.

Ms. Myrna Cunningham Kain, Professor James Anaya, Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples and Mr. Vital Bambanze, Chairperson of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous peoples participated at this event.

In her address to UNESCO, Ms. Cunningham highlighted the important relationship that exists between indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge and the World Heritage processes, due to the conservation role that indigenous peoples play in the managing of World Heritage sites. She also raised a number of issues in relation to the World Heritage processes such as the lack of recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples in the World Heritage Convention and its Operational Guidelines. Further, the World Heritage Convention does not differentiate between 'cultural' heritage and 'natural' heritage. This distinction can be problematic for the World Heritage sites located on indigenous peoples' lands and territories because indigenous peoples' life and spiritual beliefs are inseparable from their lands, territories and natural resources.

In the spirit of promoting the full realization of the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples through mobilization, inter alia, financial cooperation and technical assistance, as provided in articles 41 and 42, Ms. Cunningham called on the UN system to embrace indigenous peoples' rights in existing international standards, in particular the World Heritage Convention, and by involving indigenous peoples in the World Heritage site identification, nomination, protection and management. She stated that consideration of these issues would go a long



way towards recognizing the role of indigenous peoples as well as building more effective systems in World Heritage.

Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Traditional Cultural Expression

UN Permanent Forum member, Ms. Valmaine Toki participated in an event organized by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) on 18th July in Geneva, Switzerland. The theme of the meeting was: Making Sui Generis Protection Work: Best Practices in Community-Led Strategies for the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Traditional Cultural Expressions.

Ms. Toki joined other indigenous panelists including Mr. Williem Collin Louw, chairperson of the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa and Ms. Lucia Fernando Inacio Belfort, the Executive Director of Instituto Indigena Brasileiro papa Propriedad Intelectual.



Ms. Valmaine Toki (UN Permanent Forum member) in Geneva, Switzerland for the WIPO meeting.

Photo credit: Valmaine Toki

Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

The Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 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).

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Comings and goings at SPFII

Ms Maria Luz Aragon, a long time staff member of the United Nations and a treasured member of SPFII retired at the end of September 2011. Ms Aragon worked tirelessly in making travel arrangements for Permanent Forum members and negotiating the UN's administrative processes to secure all the relevant services for meetings, in particular, the Permanent Forum's annual sessions. Ms Aragon and her husband, Diego plan to retire to their home in Argentina. We all thank her for her commitment and hard work. She is greatly missed by her work colleagues.



Luz at her office farewell, with Elsa Stamatopoulou (left) and Chandra Roy-Henriksen (right)

Photo Credit: Sonia Smallacombe