

# THE message stick

Quarterly Newsletter of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

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## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to **MESSAGE STICK**<sup>1</sup>, the newsletter that highlights the activities undertaken by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) as well as its Secretariat for the period from July to September 2007.

After more than two decades of negotiations between states and indigenous peoples brokered by the United Nations, on 13 September 2007, the General Assembly, with overwhelming majority (144 in favour, 4 against and 11 abstentions) adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This was a day of historic significance, with the Declaration having political, legal and moral implications for humanity.

As the Chairperson of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues put it on the day of the adoption: "...*The 13th of September 2007 will be remembered as an international human rights day for the Indigenous Peoples of the world, a day that the United Nations and its Member States, together with Indigenous Peoples, reconciled with past painful histories and decided to march into the future on the path of human rights.... For the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Declaration will become the major foundation and reference in implementing its mandate to advise members of the Economic and Social Council and the UN agencies, programmes and funds on indigenous peoples' human rights and development.*

A new challenge is in front since indigenous peoples and their issues are of global concern.

We hope that you will find this edition of the Message Stick informative and useful and we look forward to receiving your feedback comments, questions, and suggestions at the following address: [IndigenousPermanentForum@un.org](mailto:IndigenousPermanentForum@un.org)

*Secretariat of the UNPFII*

<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.



## DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

### Press conference on Indigenous Rights Declaration, 6 September, UNHQ

*EXCERPTS of UNDPI press conference, 6 September 2007.*

"Indigenous peoples' representatives, at a Headquarters press conference this morning, endorsed the amended text of the draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and called for its adoption by consensus by the General Assembly next week.

Speaking to the press about the latest developments regarding the negotiations on the draft were: Les Malezer, Chair of the Global Indigenous Caucus; Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Chairperson of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues; and Joseph Ole Simel, Coordinator of the African Regional Indigenous Caucus.

The draft was forwarded to the Assembly following its approval by the United Nations Human Rights Council on 29 June 2006, and action on the text is expected on 13 September. Initially scheduled for November 2006, the adoption of the text was deferred, on a motion by African States, until the end of the Assembly's current session in September 2007, so that further consultations could take place.

Mr. Malezer said that, presented with an agreement between the African Group and co-sponsors of the draft, the Steering Committee -- a body made up of representatives from seven regional groups -- had asked for indigenous peoples' opinions on the Declaration and formed its response on the basis of those communications. While many of the indigenous peoples supported the amended Declaration, many others took the position not to oppose its adoption. Some felt strongly that they should not be bound by the process and emphasized the right of indigenous peoples to decide their own arrangements in their own time frame.

Of most significance, however, was the level of support for the introduction of the modified text for adoption, based upon numerous important provisions preserved in the draft, he continued. Therefore, the Steering Committee endorsed the adoption of the text, as modified, conditional upon assurances that any further proposals to amend the Declaration would be opposed by the African Group and co-sponsoring States. The level of support given to the text in the Assembly would demonstrate the degree of commitment and good faith by the international community for the implementation of that standard, upholding and implementing the rights of indigenous peoples."

.....

"Ms. Tauli-Corpuz said that, in the short time since the amended text had been presented to the Forum, the majority of its members had expressed support for the draft. "We believe that the most important provisions of the declaration were kept intact and we, therefore, endorse that this text be presented at the General Assembly for adoption," she said. The adoption of the text would be an historical milestone. It would be a key instrument for raising awareness of indigenous peoples' rights, a major reference document, and an important foundation for the work of the Permanent Forum. ...."

To read the complete transcript of the press conference, please visit

[http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2007/070906\\_Indigenous.doc.htm](http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2007/070906_Indigenous.doc.htm)

### Adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, General Assembly, United Nations Headquarters, 13 September 2007.



**Indigenous leaders at the General Assembly Hall, 2007**

*EXCERPTS of UNDPI press release, GA/10612, Sixty-first General Assembly Plenary 107th & 108th Meetings (AM & PM), 13 September 2007.*

"The General Assembly today overwhelmingly backed protections for the human rights of indigenous peoples, adopting a landmark declaration that brought to an end nearly 25 years of contentious negotiations over the rights of native people to protect their lands and resources, and to maintain their unique cultures and traditions.

By a vote of 144 in favor to 4 against (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States), with 11 abstentions, the Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which sets out the individual and collective rights of the world's 370 million native peoples, calls for the maintenance and strengthening of their cultural identities, and emphasizes their right to pursue development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations.

A non-binding text, the Declaration states that native peoples have the right "to the recognition, observance and enforcement of treaties" concluded with States or their successors. It also prohibits discrimination against indigenous peoples and promotes their full and effective participation in all matters that concern them.

The Human Rights Council adopted the Declaration in June 2006, over the objections of some Member States with sizeable indigenous populations. The Assembly deferred consideration of the text late last year at the behest of African countries, which raised objections about language on self-determination and the definition of "indigenous" people.

"The importance of this document for indigenous peoples and, more broadly, for the human rights agenda, cannot be underestimated," said General Assembly President Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa in a statement delivered by Assembly Vice-President, Aminu Bashir Wali of Nigeria.

She warned that, even with the progress achieved by events such as the 1995 first United Nations International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples

and the beginning of the Second International Decade last year, native peoples still faced marginalization, extreme poverty and other human rights violations. They were often dragged into conflicts and land disputes that threatened their way of life and very survival; and, suffered from a lack of access to health care and education.”

To read the complete press release, please visit <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2007/ga10612.doc.htm>

**General Assembly, 62nd session High Level Segment: World leaders welcome the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.**

Addressing the General Assembly's annual high-level debate on 26 September 2007, President Rafael Correa (Ecuador) and President Evo Morales (Bolivia) welcomed the recent approval of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, thanking all countries that supported the Declaration.

“Our culture is a culture of life,” said Evo Morales, the first indigenous leader of Bolivia.

He called on the UN to convene a World Conference on Indigenous Peoples to “understand different ways of life.”

Questioning whether it was necessary to exploit and plunder in order to live well, he suggested instead that living well is living within a community – not having an excess of material wealth.

To indigenous communities, he said, the Earth is sacred, as demonstrated by their practices. “Let us gather these experiences to defend life and to save humankind,” he said.

President Rafael Correa (Ecuador) stated “The United Nations General Assembly adopted a few days ago the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which was cosponsored and actively negotiated by Ecuador. This legal instrument waited more than twenty years for its approval and will be a fundamental base for the protection of human rights of our indigenous peoples”.

To read the UN DPI press coverage, GA10623, 26 September 2007, PM, please visit <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/ga10623.doc.htm>

## IMPORTANT MEETINGS

### ***Representation of the UNPFII at important meetings of relevance to its mandate***

**Participation of Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, at the Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore of the World Intellectual Property Organization, 9 July, Geneva, Switzerland**

The Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore (IGC) serves “an international forum for debate and dialogue concerning the interplay between intellectual property (IP), and traditional knowledge (TK), genetic resources, and traditional cultural expressions (TECs)/ (folklore)” Established by the WIPO General Assembly in 2000, it met for the first time in 2001. The eleventh session of the IGC was held in Geneva (3-12 July, 2007). The agenda of this meeting included: an update on implementation of the WIPO Voluntary Fund for Accredited Indigenous and Local Communities; deliberations on a revised draft set of Objectives and Principles for the Protection of Traditional Cultural Expressions/Expressions of Folklore and Objectives and Principles for the Protection of Traditional Knowledge; discussions on recognition of TK within the patent system,

and the interface between the patent system and genetic resources; and practical means for effecting the international dimensions of the work done by IGC.

Ms. Tauli-Corpuz addressed the 11th Session of the IGC; to read her statement, please visit [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/statement\\_vtc\\_wipo\\_july07.doc](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/statement_vtc_wipo_july07.doc)

**Participation of Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, at the ECOSOC Regular Session of 2007, 10 July, Geneva, Switzerland**

The Chairperson of the Permanent Forum addressed the ECOSOC functional commissions' Chairpersons and Council President respectively. Although the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is not a functional commission as such, its broad mandate in the areas of economic and social development, environment, health, education, culture and human rights, makes it that UNPFII's work interfaces with almost all the functional commissions of ECOSOC.

Within this context, Ms. Tauli-Corpuz delivered a statement that highlighted how the UNPFII has contributed to MDG 1 on the eradication of poverty and hunger, as well as the broader implementation of the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. Ms. Tauli-Corpuz stated that decent work for indigenous peoples does not only mean formal employment but also the ensuring that their traditional livelihoods which are sustainable and viable are not destroyed because of the promotion by governments of the dominant development paradigm.

To read the complete statement of Ms. Tauli-Corpuz, please visit at [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/statement\\_vtc\\_ECOSOC\\_07.doc](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/statement_vtc_ECOSOC_07.doc)

**WIPO recognizes the importance on indigenous participation, 11 July 2003, Geneva, Switzerland.**

The WIPO Intergovernmental Committee on Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore during its 11th session from 3 to 12 July 2007.

The following is an extract from the decisions taken by the session dealing with the future mandate and work plan of the Committee:

“The Intergovernmental Committee reviewed the progress made on its substantive agenda items at the current and previous sessions of its current mandate, and

(i) Agreed that progress had been made on its substantive work to date;

(ii) Agreed that its work had greatly benefited from the enhanced participation of representatives of indigenous and local communities made possible by various initiatives including the successful launch of the WIPO Voluntary Fund, and also from the participation of intergovernmental organizations;

(iii) Agreed to recommend to the WIPO General Assembly that the current mandate of the Committee be renewed as set out in document WO/GA/30/8, paragraphs 93 to 95.

To read the complete article, please visit WIPO's website at <http://tkbulletin.wordpress.com/2007/07/17/tk-at-igc-11-meeting-review/>

**Participation of Ms. Otilia Lux de Coti and SPFII at the X Session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, 6-9 August, Quito, Ecuador**



**Participants at the panel discussion**

The side event "Citizenship and Rights of Indigenous Women and Afro descendants" was jointly organized by the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (SPFII).

The panel was held on 8 of August within the context of the X Session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and The Caribbean organized by ECLAC (<http://www.eclac.cl>). Speakers included: Otilia Luz de Coti, Member of the UNPFII; Margarita Antonio, Miskitu from Nicaragua and Maria Ines Barbosa, Afro descendant from Brazil. This year the Regional Conference on Women focused on the contribution of women to the economy and social protection, particularly through unpaid work, and on political participation and gender parity.

The event was attended by high UN country officials, some 100 women representing regional organizations, some 25 indigenous women from the Indigenous Women Network of the Americas (Enlace Continental), some 15 indigenous leaders from Ecuador and media, which allowed a productive dialogue in favour of indigenous and Afro-descendant women rights in the region.

At the panel discussion participants called for implementation of the recommendations of the UNPFII and Resolution E/CN.6/2005/L.10 of the Commission on the Status of Women related to indigenous women and this was included in the "Declaration of Indigenous Women to build a pluri-national State". References to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the recommendations of the UNPFII appear at the Consensus of Quito (<http://www.eclac.cl/publicaciones/xml/5/29555/dsc1i.pdf>), which is the Governments' final document at the X Session of the Regional Conference on Women.

An important meeting between the Member of the Permanent Forum, indigenous women and the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional (AECI), UNIFEM was held to coordinate a preparatory meeting for the next UNPFII session. Also, the Indigenous Women Network of the Americas proposed the organization of a regional meeting on climate change as a contribution for next year's Forum's session.

Also, on 8 of August the International Day of the World's Indigenous People was commemorated with the launch of the Ecuador's country visit report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of the human rights and

fundamental freedoms of indigenous people. At the afternoon event Nina Pacari and Otilia Lux de Coti, members of the UNPFII, addressed the audience.

**MEETINGS UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE UNPFII AND ITS SECRETARIAT**

**International Workshop on Perspectives of Relationships between Indigenous Peoples and Industrial Companies, 1 – 4 July, Salekhard, Russian Federation**

The International Workshop on Perspectives of Relationships between Indigenous Peoples and Industrial Companies was held in Salekhard, Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Russian Federation, on 2 and 3 July 2007. The workshop was co-organized by the Administration of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East (RAIPON) and the Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, with support from the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation.

Some 80 persons participated at the workshop, including 13 Members of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, indigenous experts from the Pacific Region, Central and South America, Africa, the Arctic, North America, and the Russian Federation, representatives of 7 companies operating in the Russian Federation, representatives of the Government of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, the Government of the Russian Federation and the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, and representatives of national and international non-governmental organizations.

To read workshop documents and report, please visit at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/workshopPRIPIC.html>

**International Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous Peoples and Protection of the Environment, 27 - 29 August 2007, Khabarovsk, Russian Federation.**

The Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous Peoples and Protection of the Environment was hosted by the Government of Khabarovsk, the Association of Indigenous Peoples of the Russian North, Siberia and the Far East (RAIPON) in the Russian Federation. It was organized by the Government of Khabarovsk, the Association of Indigenous Peoples of the Russian North, Siberia and the Far East (RAIPON), the Public Chamber of Russian Federation and the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

The objective of the meeting was to promote an opportunity to exchange information on the adverse effects of wide ranging toxic, dangerous products and wastes that impact on the well-being of indigenous peoples' spiritual, cultural and physical well-being, their food sources and lands; identify types of environmental discrimination and the forms that it takes; consider how indigenous peoples might seek administrative or legal remedies in regards to the effects of toxic, dangerous products and wastes as well as natural and man-made disasters under existing international standards; highlight good practice models; identify gaps and challenges and a possible way forward; draw attention to the contamination of the Amur river which flows along

transnational borders and has a dramatic impact on the traditional lifestyle and health of indigenous peoples of the Khabarovsk Krai region.

To read workshop documents and report, please visit at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/workshopIPPE.html>

## SECOND INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

**Letter to Indigenous organizations regarding the 2008 Trust Fund on Indigenous Issues relating to the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People cycle, 8 September 2007, UNHQ**

In May 2007, the Bureau of the Permanent Forum, acting as the Advisory Group for the Trust Fund met to consider 78 project proposals. Of those, 20 were awarded this year. This marked the end of the 2007 cycle and the beginning of the 2008 cycle. The next round of calls for project proposals is now open.

Applications for the next round of Trust Fund grants are open now being accepted and the closing deadline is 1 November 2006. There will be no exceptions made for proposals submitted after the deadline.

The proposals will be assessed by the UNPFII's Bureau in April 2008 and applicants will receive notice thereafter.

Information on the Trust Fund available in English, Spanish, French and Russian at [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/second\\_trustfund.html](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/second_trustfund.html)

## INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION

**UNDESA Mission to Ecuador meets Indigenous Mayors**

The UN system in Ecuador organized a workshop on 13-14 September with resident and non-resident agencies to discuss the overall support of the UN system to the Ecuador National Development Plan (2007-2010). In this context, the UNDESA Mission took the opportunity to advance the review of a project to strengthen the institutional capacity of alternative municipalities in Ecuador. Counting on the support of INDESIC (Instituto para el Desarrollo Social y las Investigaciones Científicas) the Mission composed by UNDESA, UN-HABITAT and UNFPA (Ecuador country officers) visited Mayor Mario Conejo of Otavalo and Mayor Auki Tituana/ Deputy Mayor Patricia Espinoza Moreno of Cotacachi who have been elected since the mid-1990s.

Says Jonas Rabinovitch, Senior Socio-Economic Governance Adviser to UNDESA: "These Mayors are demonstrating to the world that participatory approaches and transparent governance are the way forward. In line with traditional indigenous approaches towards consensual resolution, they found their own path to achieve results through participation. Cotacachi with a population of 50,000 has established County Assemblies and claims to decide 100% of its investment budget of US\$ 1.8 million through them.

Cotacachi has undertaken a comprehensive policy of cooperation with international organizations thus expanding the municipal budget. Otavalo with a population of 100,000 has established a "participation secretariat" within City Hall and liaises directly with communities for the resolution of their own water, roads, electricity supply and other problems through cost-

sharing. In the urban area, residents contribute 60% of the cost while the city contributes 40%. In the rural area neighbourhoods contribute 25% and the city contributes 75%. Of course there are difficulties, but the bottom line is that both populations see concrete results in a transparent manner and have re-elected their leaders for various mandates".

## UNDG TASK TEAM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES / IASG

**Task Team on Indigenous Issues of the UNDG meets/decides to send Draft Guidelines to UNCTS**

The UNDG Task Team on Indigenous Issues met on 5 September to review its draft Guidelines on Indigenous Peoples' Issues. Once all of the agencies' inputs and comments were included and the draft guidelines were approved, the Task Team decided to send them to the following UN Country Teams for review and feedback: Ecuador, Bolivia, Panama, Guyana, Argentina, Kenya, Cameroon, Namibia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nepal, Philippines. Feedback from UNCTs is expected by the end of October and the Task Team plans to finalize the guidelines, along with the action plan for their implementation, by the end of 2007.

The purpose of the guidelines is to assist the UN system to mainstream and integrate indigenous issues in processes for operational activities and programmes at the country level. The guidelines set out the broad normative, policy and operational framework for implementing a human rights based and a culturally sensitive approach to development for and with indigenous peoples, provide lines of action for planning, implementation and evaluation of programmes for indigenous peoples and duly integrate the principles of cultural diversity.

**Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues / 2007 Annual Meeting hosted by the Secretariat of the CBD, Montreal, Canada, 17 - 19 September 2007.**

The 2007 meeting of the Inter-Agency Support Group on indigenous issues was convened and hosted by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Montreal on 17-19 September. The theme of the meeting was "Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples". Other agenda items included follow-up to the 2006 IASG meeting, coordination of international work of indicators, areas for possible inter-agency cooperation, and the UNDG Draft Guidelines on Indigenous Peoples' Issues.

Representatives from the following UN agencies, multilateral organizations and international financial institutions participated: United Nations University Institute of Advance Studies, World Bank, OHCHR, SPFII, IFAD, IOM, UNDP, WIPO, UN Habitat, UNESCO, ILO, Fondo Indígena, UNICEF and the SCBD. Forum members Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Wilton Littlechild and Hassan Id Balkassm also participated.

The report of the IASG will be submitted to the seventh session of the UNPFII.

## INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S ISSUES

**Participation of SPFII to the VIII International Meeting on Gender Statistics for Public Policies, 5-7 September, Aguascalientes, Mexico.**



**Teresa Rodríguez, UNIFEM LAC**

The VIII International Meeting was organized by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (INEGI), ECLAC, the Mexican National Institute for Women (InMujeres). The meeting was held in the city of Aguascalientes, Mexico.

The aim of the meeting was to exchange experiences and discuss conceptual and methodological progress reached until now as well as the analysis and use of statistics and gender indicators in public policies. The importance of international strategies and countries' experiences on the matter were discussed, within the MDGs framework, and the agenda also included sessions dedicated to the issues of Inter-institutional alliance practice, experiences in incorporating gender perspectives in the work of statistics offices in the region, gender statistics for health, gender statistics for indigenous populations, gender statistics and education, eradicate gender violence, among others.

The event was attended by high management employees of the National Statistics' Offices and Women Institutes and directors of multinational agencies, which allowed a productive dialogue in favour of the development of gender-sensitive statistics in the region.

Mexico presently heads, through its National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (INEGI), the CEPAL Statistics Conference of the Americas ([www.eclac.cl/ceacepal](http://www.eclac.cl/ceacepal)). In this role, INEGI coordinates national statistical offices and heads the UN Statistics Commission (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd.statcom.commission.htm>). Given that UNIFEM and INEGI are partners in developing statistical information with a focus on equity, it was strategic to them that the Permanent Forum joined the panel on "Gender Statistics for indigenous population" (September 6). The panel presented the international framework on indigenous peoples' rights to promote indigenous peoples', especially women's full participation in the upcoming 2010 round of censuses, as it is stated in a recommendation of the UNPFII at its sixth session (paragraph 127(d) of E/2007/43). Panelists also presented the report of the meeting on "Indicators of Well-being", so participants understood the urgent need to include indigenous peoples in statistics, especially indigenous women, in the upcoming 2010 round of census.

To read the report of the meeting on indicators of well-being in Nicaragua (CRP.2), please visit our website at the following link: [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/session\\_sixth.html#docs](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/session_sixth.html#docs).

## SPECIAL NEWS

### **ECOSOC decisions on the UNPFII's recommendations.**

In July 2007 the Economic and Social Council adopted the

draft decisions proposed by the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at its sixth session (draft decisions I, II and III in E/2007/43) by consensus and without amendments.

The following decisions were thus adopted by ECOSOC:

- ECOSOC decisions 2007/244 International Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous Languages
- ECOSOC decision 2007/245 Venue and dates of the seventh session
- ECOSOC decision 2007/246 Draft agenda of the seventh session
- ECOSOC decision 2007/270 the Council took note of the report of the sixth session of the UNPFII.

### **International Day of the World's Indigenous People, 9 August 2007, UNHQ**

To celebrate the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, the Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the NGO Committee on the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples organized morning and afternoon events with panels and presentations focusing on indigenous youth and indigenous languages. A sacred pipe ceremony was also held.

To read about the celebrations and the messages issued by the Secretary-General, the Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs, the Chairperson of the UNPFII and others, please visit at <http://www.un.org/events/indigenous/2007/>

### **Visit of Ms. Casimira Rodríguez, Bolivian Former Minister of Justice to SPFII, 18 September 2007**



In Latin America, millions of women are domestic workers. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), fifteen per cent of the sub

continent's female workforce is employed in an industry that has been described as legalized discrimination and even modern slavery.

Globally overlooked and forgotten, these women often suffer abuse, sexual harassment and even rape in their working lives.

Casimira Rodríguez's life has been spent as a domestic worker and as an organizer of domestic workers. At the age of 13 she was taken — essentially kidnapped — from her rural village in Mizque and brought to the city of Cochabamba to work, with the promise that she would be given in return the schooling and care her campesino parents could not provide. Instead, her supposed employers held Rodríguez in abusive servitude for two years, forcing her to work long hours with no pay. Casimira is a former leader in the Domestic Workers' Union, which she helped found.

Casimira Rodríguez was Bolivia's first indigenous Quechua woman to serve as Minister of Justice from February 2006 until January 23, 2007. She sought to

reform corruption and inefficiency in the judicial system by working to build trust and humanity.

Rodríguez's experience is the lot of many of the Quechua and Aymara women of Bolivia. Poverty draws them from rural areas to cities, where persistent racial and economic discrimination relegates them almost exclusively to domestic work.

In February 2006, Casimira Rodríguez became Bolivia's new Minister of Justice. She was replaced in a cabinet change in January 2007 by Celima Torrico.

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All previous issues of *MESSAGE STIK* are available to download here:

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/newsletter.html>

