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[Visit to Colombia](#)

[Open letter from the Members of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues](#)

[International Day of the World's Indigenous People](#)

[Interview with Mick Dodson, Member of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues](#)

[Other meetings](#)

[EMRIP](#)

[World Heritage Committee](#)

The Message Stick<sup>1</sup> highlights the activities undertaken by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) as well as its Secretariat. It is produced by SPFII staff.



From the International Day of the World's Indigenous People

<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.

**Visit to Colombia**

In response to an invitation of the Government of Colombia, four members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues visited Colombia on 6-10 July, 2010. The purpose of the visit was to observe the situation of indigenous peoples in Colombia in general with a particular focus on the situation of the Awa peoples.



Members of the Permanent Forum: Bartolome Clavero, Paimaneh Hasteh, Carlos Mamani and Margaret Lokawua.

At the end of the visit, Mr. Carlos Mamani Condori issued the following press release:

Bogota, Colombia, 10 July 2010 - "In spite of constitutional recognition of the human rights of indigenous peoples, the situation of indigenous peoples in Colombia is serious, critical and deeply worrisome". That is the conclusion of the mission of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The Forum recognizes and values the contributions of the Government of Colombia and other State institutions, such as the Constitutional Court and the *Defensoría del Pueblo* (Ombudsman), to address the serious problems faced by indigenous peoples, nevertheless, human rights abuses persist.



In response to an invitation extended by the Government of Colombia, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues visited the country from 5 to 9 July 2010. Previously, indigenous organizations of Colombia had also suggested that the Forum conduct such a visit. The purpose of the mission was to observe the situation of the indigenous peoples of Colombia and, in particular, the situation of the Awa and other indigenous peoples experiencing conflict-related abuses and facing the risk of extinction.



**The Forum Members met with Awa representatives in El Diviso.**

During its visit, the Forum met with governmental offices, including the Ministry of Interior and Justice and the Ministry of Defense, as well as the Office of the Attorney General, the Office of the Public Prosecutor and the *Defensoría del Pueblo* (Ombudsman). It also carried out meetings with indigenous peoples and indigenous people's organizations, NGOs and with agencies of the United Nation System. The Forum visited Bogota, Valledupar, Pereira and El Diviso.

The Forum thanks the Government of Colombia for its invitation, as well as the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC), the indigenous peoples of Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta, the

organizations of the coffee cultivation area, organizations of the Awa peoples and the indigenous peoples of Nariño, Cauca, Putumayo, among other areas. It is also thankful for the support provided in the organization and carrying out of the visit, as well as for the important information shared with the Forum.

The Forum highly values the dialogue established with Awa peoples, who live in a situation of extreme vulnerability due to the invasion of their territory by armed forces. In 2009, two massacres were perpetrated against the Awa. In spite of the dialogue that the Awa have established and maintained with the municipal, departmental and national authorities, the Awa continue to face egregious human rights abuses including homicides, kidnappings, internal displacement, confinement, forced recruitment and threats persist.

The Forum recognizes the efforts of the Awa people and the government in the design of a safeguard plan, as ordered by the Constitutional Court in its 004 decision. As of today, the plan is under development and a budget has not been approved for its implementation. The Permanent Forum is deeply concern about the safety and wellbeing of the Awa peoples and will closely follow-up their situation and the implementation of their safeguard plan.

The Forum is extremely concerned about the situation of extreme vulnerability and abuses committed against indigenous women and children. The Forum received reports of acts of rape, forced recruitment and use of minors as informants, among others abuses in the context of conflict.

The Permanent Forum considers that it is necessary to strengthen and improve measures to guarantee the fundamental

rights of the indigenous peoples of Colombia, and in particular, to consolidate mechanisms to guarantee the well-being of indigenous peoples, particularly those at risk of extinction, in areas impacted by armed conflict. Such measures must be undertaken in consultation with and with the approval of affected indigenous peoples.

To address the needs of indigenous peoples threatened by armed conflict it is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of the Early Warning System of the Ombudsman's office and establish the necessary mechanisms to guarantee its effective operation to ensure the government's adequate response to the System's risk reports, as well as the protection of indigenous peoples.

The Forum is particularly concerned that an effective mechanism has not been established to guarantee the implementation of the recommendations emitted by the United Nations special rapporteurs, which have included valuable proposals that could help to improve the situation of indigenous peoples. It is necessary to establish a mechanism of effective dialogue with indigenous people's organizations and the agencies of United Nations system in Colombia. This mechanism must also supervise the full compliance of the 004 decision of the Constitutional Court, as well as other Court decisions in favour of indigenous peoples.

The Forum is also concerned by the displacement of indigenous peoples, Afro-Colombians and *campesino* populations due to both the armed conflict and the invasion of territories for legal or illegal cultivation, for the exploitation of resources such as minerals and hydrocarbons.

The Forum values the Government's important investment in the Social Action

Programme, which offers support to internally displaced people, including indigenous peoples. The Forum received allegations, however, that the Social Action Programme does not have a culturally appropriate approach with regard to indigenous peoples. The displacement of indigenous peoples is one more factor that contributes to the risk of extinction and should be prevented to the greatest extent possible.

In spite of the legal recognition of the right to consultation, the Forum has received allegations regarding projects being implemented in indigenous territories, without the realization of a prior consultation seeking to obtain their free consent.

The Permanent Forum reiterates its gratitude to the Government of Colombia, ONIC, the authorities of the Awa peoples, and to all of the indigenous people's organizations and individuals who collected and provided information to the Forum.

The Forum will study all information received and will elaborate a report on the mission, together with recommendations to promote the protection and respect of the human rights of indigenous peoples in Colombia.





### **Open letter of the Members of the Permanent forum on Indigenous Issues**

The Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues recognize the exemplary and outstanding service of Ms. Elsa Stamatopoulou as Chief of the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on the occasion of her departure from the UN System.

Ms. Stamatopoulou worked to advance human rights since 1980 and the rights of indigenous peoples in the United Nations since 1983, including as Deputy Director in the New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights from 1999 to 2003. From the time of its inception in 2003, Ms. Stamatopoulou served as Chief of the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, where she demonstrated outstanding commitment to the advancement of the rights of indigenous peoples.



In that capacity and while supporting the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Ms. Stamatopoulou promoted the integration, at international and national level, of UN policies on indigenous peoples' issues in the areas of economic and social development, environment, health, human rights, education and culture. She promoted coordination of activities on indigenous peoples' issues within the UN system and other inter-governmental organizations;

awareness of indigenous issues at all levels of civil society, the media and academia. She directed catalytic projects on indigenous issues in the field. She supervised the production of the first ever State on the World's Indigenous Peoples publication of the United Nations (2010).

Her duty and dedication have greatly benefited not only the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues but also indigenous peoples throughout the world and the human rights movement overall. We know that she will keep working for the rights of the indigenous peoples in her future endeavors outside of the UN system.

The Members of the Permanent Forum are grateful for the many contributions of Ms. Stamatopoulou through her work at the United Nations, and are united in giving due credit and tribute to Ms. Stamatopoulou and the high standards that she has set as an international civil servant.



## **International Day of the World's Indigenous People**

The International Day of the World's Indigenous People was celebrated on 9 August at UN Headquarters. The theme of this year's celebration was indigenous filmmaking and the programme included a screening of four films made by indigenous film makers, three of whom were there in person to introduce their film and participate in a panel discussion afterwards.

The ceremony was very well attended by both indigenous activists and others from the NGO community as well as UN staff, including Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and Under-Secretary-General Sha Zukang.

*The theme of this year's Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is indigenous filmmakers, who give us windows into their communities, cultures and history. Their work connects us to belief systems and philosophies; it captures both the daily life and the spirit of indigenous communities.*

-Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The films that were screened were the following:

**Ivan and Ivan** Directed by Philipp Abryutin (Chucki)

**Curte-Nillas:(short) movie** Directed by Mr. Per-Josef Idivuoma (Sámi)

**Taino Indians counted out of existence**  
Directed by Mr. Alex Zacarias (Taíno)

**Sikumi (On the ice)** Directed by Mr. Andrew Okpeaha MacLean (Inupiaq)



**From left: Roberto Borrero, Kevin Tarrant, Andrew Okpeaha Maclean, Sha Zukang, Ban Ki-Moon, Reaghan Tarbell, Alex Zacarias, Per-Josef Idvuoma**

In preparing for the ceremony and the special theme of indigenous film making, SPFII enjoyed the wonderful guidance from staff at the National Museum of the American Indian. Indeed, the panel discussions of the film directors were moderated by Reaghan Tarbell from the Film and Video Center of NMAI.



**Interview with Mick Dodson, Member of the Permanent Forum, 2005-2010**

*Mick Dodson has been a Member of the Permanent Forum for the past 6 years, during which time he served as the Rapporteur for five years. He is coming to the end of his second term as a Member of the Permanent Forum and he agreed to answer a few questions in September 2010.*

*How did you feel when the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples was passed in the General Assembly on 13 September 2007 and what challenges do you think are still to overcome?*

I was elated to hear that the declaration went through the General Assembly. So many Indigenous Peoples had worked so hard for it over 2 decades it was a fitting result for all that hope and effort. I was disappointed that the Australian government did not support the resolution at the time but that position has now changed. I was nevertheless buoyed at the time by the overwhelming vote in favour of the adoption of the Declaration. The clear challenge now confronting us is how do we get States to honour the spirit of the Declaration and implement its terms domestically. I think indigenous peoples must now work nationally and internationally to get States to put in place domestic Declaration implementation action plans in partnership with Indigenous peoples in those States.

*What do you think are some of the most pressing issues for indigenous peoples at the international level?*

I think the key objectives for indigenous Peoples internationally is to support the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals. The Forum and the special procedures of the UN has a central role in

advocating and agitating for the achievement of the MDG's but so too do all actors in the UN system. This is an international objective but in the end the main players are the States because it is at that level that the transformation must occur.

*Can you tell us a little bit about your experience as a Member of the Permanent Forum for the past six years.*

I think over the past 6 years the Forum has grown in stature and relevance in the UN system. The great challenge has been the way in which we carry out our work. How we get things done and getting our recommendations implemented. that is the ultimate challenge for the Forum. If we are to be effective we must somehow ensure our recommendations are addressed fully. We have to stay objective, professional and relevant. The Forum has to maintain its integrity as a place where all come and feel safe and be heard and indigenous peoples have a particular stake and responsibility to ensure that this happens. I am very proud of my 5 years as Rapporteur for the Forum.



With the considerable expert help from the secretariat and my colleagues we have developed an excellent methodology for the compilation of the Report in a timely and professional manner. It can be improved but the foundations are firm. What has





made me laugh has been the wit and humour of many indigenous delegates. Our sense of humour is still with us after so many centuries of tragedy, it is what binds us, helps us to keep going and I think key to our survival. There is nothing like a good laugh to break tensions, aid communication and to move forward.

*Where do you see the Permanent Forum going from here?*

The Forum in its own way has been a tool of reform in the UN and has had an impact on how the UN goes about its business. It has certainly put indigenous issues on the agenda and the visibility of indigenous peoples in the system has never been so great. Building on this engagement is key to the future. I think the membership of the Forum must stay focused on getting the UN to properly and seriously discuss and address indigenous issues as identified by indigenous Peoples. The Forum is still evolving and this provides an opportunity for it to be central to securing the rights, fundamental freedoms, well-being and future of indigenous peoples. It is on the cusp of great things.

*What are your own plans for the future?*

I think I will continue to participate in the UN and its meetings and other activities concerning indigenous peoples. I will continue to promote, particularly to our younger leadership at home the importance of engaging internationally. I think I will be spending more time at home though. My people, the Yawuru have recently concluded a land settlement deal with the government of Western Australia. We have much of our traditional lands returned to us and managing it and other things will keep us all busy. I am keen to make whatever contribution my people think is useful.

## Other meetings

### 3<sup>rd</sup> session Expert Mechanism

12-16 July, 2010

Geneva

Carlos Mamani, Chair of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues participated in the third session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Mr. Mamani informed the Expert Mechanism of the work of the Permanent Forum, providing an update on the results of the Ninth Session.

The Expert Mechanism is currently conducting a study on indigenous peoples and the right to participate in decision-making. The final report will be ready in 2011. A [progress report](#) was submitted to the Human Rights Council in September 2010.<sup>2</sup>

### 34<sup>th</sup> session of the World Heritage Committee

25 July – 3 August, 2010

Brasilia

Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Member of the Permanent Forum attended the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the World Heritage Committee in Brasilia in July, where she addressed the Committee. At that meeting, Papahānaumokuākea in Hawaii was inscribed as a mixed World Heritage site.

This was the first time that a Permanent Forum member had addressed the World Heritage Committee. Ms. Tauli-Corpuz was given one minute to speak. Her statement is below in full.

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<sup>2</sup> The Progress Report of the Expert Mechanism is available here:  
[http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/indigenous/ExpertMechanism/3rd/docs/A\\_HRC\\_EM RIP\\_2010\\_2\\_en.doc](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/indigenous/ExpertMechanism/3rd/docs/A_HRC_EM RIP_2010_2_en.doc)



"Thank you Mr. Chair for giving me the opportunity to speak. I am Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, a member of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Our main mandate as a UN Body is to provide expert advice and recommendations to the Economic and Social Council as well as programmes, funds and agencies of the UN. In addition, the Forum is mandated to promote the integration and coordination of activities related to indigenous issues within the UN System. To implement this mandate I was requested by the Forum to attend this 34th Session of the World Heritage Committee. As you know, the World Heritage Convention is very important to indigenous peoples and the Permanent Forum. In many of the sessions of the Forum, indigenous representatives have made statements related to World Heritage Sites. Some of these are positive statements. Others raised concerns related to the identification and management of sites found in their traditional territories. In the interest of time I will not enumerate these concerns. I would just like to inform you that the Permanent Forum will submit in writing some of these issues to the World Heritage Committee for its information and consideration."

### **The Secretariat of the Permanent Forum**

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 the Secretariat**

Elsa Stamatopoulou has left the United Nations after some 30 years of service. She is missed by her colleagues.

