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Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
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FOCUSING ON EDUCATION, SPEAKERS IN PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES STRESS

IMPORTANCE OF ATTENTION TO LANGUAGE, CULTURE, TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Indigenous children were more likely to attend school if their communities participated in all decisions about the content and management of their educational systems, a top official of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) told the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues today, as it continued its fourth session.

Lamenting the high number of indigenous children who failed to complete primary school, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Rima Salah said indigenous children would feel comfortable in schools if they harmonized with their culture and traditions in a language they understood. Studies had shown that education conducted in their mother tongue allowed children to learn more quickly and transfer skills to another language.

She added that education for indigenous children meant learning about their own community's ancestral traditions and reading and counting in their mother tongues, as well as their country's history and dominant language. Emphasizing that non-indigenous children should also receive intercultural education, she said they could then learn about indigenous cultures and languages and positive inputs indigenous peoples made to overall society.

Bringing together some 1,500 indigenous leaders, activists and representatives, this year's Forum is focusing on indigenous people and the Millennium Development Goals of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger and universal primary education. It aims to draw up recommendations for the United Nations system in the areas of economic and social development, environment, health, human rights, culture and education.

Furthering Ms. Salah's argument, several speakers pointed to the predominance of Western curricula and predominant country language in schools, and the absence of indigenous culture and values. A representative of Tugara Nation/Pacific Caucus called on governments to amend their constitutions to recognize indigenous languages as legal, and to redefine primary education so that it reflected indigenous views of education.

Speakers also underscored the importance of linking educational quality with attention to indigenous language, culture and traditional knowledge. Stressing that attention to culture and tradition in primary schools should not detract from educational quality, Guatemala's delegate said it should reinforce the identity of indigenous peoples, while improving their prospects by reducing their scientific and technological limitations.

Illustrating a case where indigenous people had actually gained control over education, Norway's delegate said her Government had placed it under the authority of the Saami (an indigenous group in Norway) parliament. All Saami pupils could receive instruction in both their language and Norwegian, while the Saami parliament ensured that their education truly reflected Saami culture. Noting that measures were needed to strengthen indigenous education rights and general welfare, she stressed the importance of a clear and comprehensive recognition of indigenous rights at the international level.

Also speaking today was the representatives of Canada.

Speaking on behalf of United Nations bodies today were representatives of the World Bank, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Among those speaking for indigenous groups were representatives of Parlamento Indígena de America's; Koani Foundation; a Mayan group;; Asia Caucus; Akha Heritage Foundation; Arctic Caucus; EMIROAF; FEINE/CONMIE; Bangladesh Indigenous People's Forum; Indigenous Women's Network in South America; American Indian Law Alliance; Native Women's Association of Canada; Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México; Assembly of First Nations; Hmong World People's Congress; Retrieve Foundation; Indigenous Federation of the Peoples of Laos; Ka Lahui Hawai'i; Peace Campaign Group; and the South Asian Indigenous Women's Forum.

In addition, representatives made statements for the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation; Saulteau First Nations; Indigenous Tribal Network; Caucus of the Caribbean; Inuit Youth Council; Dewan Adat Papua; Inuit Circumpolar Youth Council International Native Traditions Interchange; John Jay College Historical Memory Project; Land is Life; Pacific Caucus of Indigenous Peoples; Brazilian Indigenous Institute for Intellectual Property; World Council of Churches; Camarce Ngobe Bugle Regional de Nedrini; Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities; Karenni Student Union; and the Caribbean Antilles Indigenous Peoples Caucus.

The Forum will meet again at 10 a.m. on Friday, 20 May, to continue its discussion of universal primary education.

Background

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues met today to begin its discussion on universal primary education under the thematic approach of "language, cultural perspective, and traditional knowledge". (For background information, see Press Release HR/4836 of 13 May.)

Discussion

RIMA SALAH, Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), noted that many indigenous children were out of school and failed to complete the primary cycle of education. They often grew up speaking indigenous languages and had no knowledge of languages used at school. The content of the curriculum and teaching methods were often decided by the central governments without necessarily consulting indigenous communities. Resources were not always allocated to build schools, or pay and train teachers in remote areas where industrial crops continued to prevent indigenous children from having access to culturally pertinent and quality education. Prejudice and inadequacy of the learning environment were also major barriers keeping indigenous girls from going to school.

For indigenous children, she said, education meant exposure to different cultures, where they could learn about both their community's ancestral traditions and their country's history, where they could start reading and counting in their mother tongues and, at the same time, learn the dominant language of the country they lived in. However, intercultural education should also be available to non-indigenous

children, so they could learn about indigenous cultures and languages and the positive contribution indigenous peoples made to the overall society. This was the fulfilment of the obligations and commitments governments had subscribed to.

Stressing that indigenous communities must participate in all decisions regarding their education, she said that meant not only on its content, but also management of the education system as a whole, including the school calendar, training of indigenous teachers, development of material and student government. Indigenous communities would send their children to school, and children would feel comfortable there if they sensed that their education harmonized with their culture and traditions in a language they understood. Studies had shown that education conducted in their mother tongue allowed children to learn more quickly and transfer skills to another language. Bilingual education helped develop a sense of pride and self-esteem for indigenous children, and favoured continuity with their cultural background.

In Mexico, UNICEF had supported “Child-Friendly Schools”, which focused on bringing out-of-school children back to the classroom and increasing the quality of education and using the school for broader development. Schools were used to promote children’s rights, especially those pertaining to education, health, water and sanitation, nutrition, identity and participation by consolidating alternative areas for learning, such as children’s interactive mobile playrooms. Material on children’s rights was elaborated with communities in indigenous languages, and cultural activities reinforcing children’s indigenous identity were carried out.

A representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said her group was committed to achieving quality universal primary education for all by 2015, as agreed to at the 2000 Dakar conference. The challenges involved in indigenous education had been addressed in a UNESCO pamphlet published last year, and a seminar had been held on aspects of education in indigenous communities, including issues involved in multilingual and higher education. One outcome had been the realization that, while the right to education for indigenous peoples had been broadly recognized, education was often not available to indigenous groups or could not be accessed for a number of reasons such as children being unable to afford the cost.

She said cross-cutting links had enabled UNESCO to ensure that indigenous groups’ concerns and knowledge were introduced into mainstream educational materials, as, for example, in the Solomon Islands through the assistance of Denmark. The UNESCO also worked with education and cultural ministries to reconfigure the educational model from a colonial one to a modern one reflecting the indigenous influence -- Vanuatu was one of those. Further, principles and guidelines had been developed on living in a multilingual, culturally diversified world and steps had been taken to ensure the permanent preservation of traditional sports and games.

MALUNA ABEALSEN, of the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights, said there was considerable evidence affirming that indigenous levels of education were significantly lower than for non-indigenous persons. One area of concern was for indigenous peoples living in remote areas, or following a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle, who had limited access to education, and where levels of education were well below the national average. Often, factors affecting education included the cost of infrastructure or the difficulty of recruiting qualified teachers.

The Forum should consider how education could fully reflect indigenous cultures and apply to its needs, she said. If education was not conducted in indigenous languages or did not reflect the culture, indigenous levels of education would continue to be low. Moreover, indigenous groups would see the value of sending children to school if curricula fell in line with their culture and norms.

IAN JOHNSON, Vice-President of Sustainable Development of the World Bank, said his organization was dedicated to improving the welfare of indigenous cultures. There were approximately 240 million indigenous people in every part of the world, and the majority were excluded from

development gains. Even if the Millennium Development Goals were fully achieved, it was possible that indigenous people could still be excluded from benefits. Education, for example, could be hampered in some national contexts by the indigenous peoples' desire for respect of their right to recognition. Therefore, it was imperative for indigenous people to be involved in policy. To achieve that, indigenous networks must be built, and indigenous cultural and social organizations must be expanded.

He said the Bank had converted its reactive approach to a proactive one on the question of indigenous issues and was collaborating with the Forum to improve the delivery of financial assistance. In the investment area, a grant centre had been established to ensure grants were targeted to indigenous people. On investment projects, indigenous rights were written into development projects in areas such as construction. The Bank's knowledge base on indigenous peoples and issues had been expanded through learning events, as in Latin America.

The Bank's new policy on indigenous people reflected an important policy shift for the Bank itself, he said. Tribal peoples were now included in development projects, and there was an emphasis on turning appropriate benefits toward them. The policy also reflected the element of indigenous protection. Funding now was provided only with the free prior consent of the indigenous people involved. The approach was reinforced by the overall development policy of protecting vulnerable people, especially by including them on policy formulation.

"We do want to be your partner", he said, making three recommendations for strengthening the Bank's new relationship with the Forum: first, the Bank would host a workshop next year on indigenous peoples and poverty; second, a panel of experts should be established to advise the Bank on indigenous issues; and third, selected Forum experts should meet with the Bank to discuss future directions.

A representative of the International Labour Organization (ILO) said existing data showed that educational achievement was higher for indigenous girls than boys, although girls had lower attendance rates; and that more indigenous children were likely to become the victims of forced labour. Low educational rates were due to lack of access to schools, lack of investment, poverty, and cultural barriers to education for girls.

He said experience had indicated that training was a good starting point in developing an educational programme, before developing the relevant curricula and materials. Intercultural education should be offered to all students in combating discrimination. Where educational facilities were not available, children were more likely to enter into the workforce, often under abusive conditions.

Questions and Answers

Asked whether UNICEF had implemented educational projects in indigenous languages, Ms. SALAH said it had issued several textbooks in indigenous languages, especially in West Africa, where the agency had bilingual educational projects. To another question on education in pygmy areas of Africa, she said the agency had an educational programme for pygmies in Cameroon, following the policy that all children should go to school and primary education should be compulsory.

Responding to a question on World Bank projects, Mr. JOHNSON said the Bank had increased funding for educational projects in several countries, but admitted that more must be done to ensure that pedagogical materials were supplied. He added that the Bank was committed to promoting culturally sensitive and inclusive development. Creating societies that truly respected indigenous peoples should be a major component of any dialogue about development, which must see diversity as a source of strength.

In response to questions, UNESCO's representative recommended her organization's pamphlet on indigenous peoples and primary education as an excellent explanation of UNESCO's approach. She said it could be summed up thus: language is not just a tool for education but a fundamental part of individual and cultural identity.

In reply to a question on whether it was possible to influence governments in providing multilingual rather than monolingual education, she said the Forum could make recommendations to governments. Also, UNESCO worked with governments in 158 countries, plus a network of educational organizations directly involved with governments. She added that the Forum must also disseminate its recommendations in home countries and encourage participation in national indigenous councils.

She said multilingualism in education went beyond translating textbooks and into more complex elements such as including aspects of indigenous music and knowledge in mainstream textbooks. In the Pacific Islands, a tool kit was being prepared for schools there as part of UNESCO's endangered languages programme, focusing on intergenerational conduction of languages. That, in turn, was part of the UNESCO programme to safeguard endangered cultural treasures. Other aspects of UNESCO's work in preserving languages were publications of best practices on languages and dictionaries.

The World Bank representative mentioned two reports by his organization that were available and of interest to the Forum. One concerned the benefits of cohesive societies, prepared on the basis of independent evaluations showing that integrated, multicultural societies fared much better than segregated and mono-cultural ones. Another was a study on indigenous people and poverty that went beyond the public relations story to show a picture that wasn't pretty. It showed there were substantive issues to be discussed between the Bank and the Forum and that the Bank's new policy should motivate it towards better efforts. The Bank would be making a second contribution to the Forum once administrative issues were sorted out.

Discussion

The representative of Canada said it was important to recognize that the Millennium Goal of universal education was inseparable from the other Goals, which provided a common basis for cooperation to reduce poverty worldwide. He recommended that the Forum support indigenous people in forming partnerships for sustainable development in efforts to reduce poverty, describing a Canadian Government programme in that area.

The Forum should also encourage institutions, agencies and States to consider practical and meaningful ways of including indigenous peoples in poverty reducing programmes, he said. Canada had included indigenous people in international policy dialogues relating to the Millennium Goals.

The representative of the Fondacion Indo America said it was high time the international community closed the methodological gap to achieve the Millennium Goals. Imagination must be used in viewing the world to determine what could emerge by 2015. The Millennium Goal challenge called for fresh ideas in order to produce results. Otherwise, the world could be facing a catastrophe.

Parlamento Indígena de América's representative said that education through formal schooling had prepared his people to live as colonized subjects -- first by the Spanish and then by the Americans. Indigenous people had been turned into strangers on their own land, living in miserable conditions. Making education universal meant creating new people within a new cultural setting. What was needed was cultural equality that would recognize the cultures of indigenous peoples, and break with colonial patterns.

The representative of the Koani Foundation recommended that the Forum create a follow-up process for the recommendations in its own report. It should also work with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Special Rapporteurs on education and indigenous peoples to establish priority recommendations on education. Further, it should support the Pacific Voices initiative relating to educational technology, and initiate consultations with UNESCO to implement Forum recommendations to that agency. In addition, the Forum should call on all States to ratify the Convention to Eliminate all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

A representative for a Maya group said the education of indigenous children must teach them to carry on the tradition that the world and its gifts were sacred. The Forum should ensure that governments made certain that the primary education of indigenous children provided information about indigenous peoples; supported regional conferences on indigenous issues; assisted indigenous communities to preserve traditional knowledge; contributed to a global report on the world's indigenous peoples; and facilitated regional strategies for preserving indigenous cultures. The entire United Nations system must be brought into assisting the Forum to report on the status of the sacred in the world.

A member of the International Institute spoke on behalf of the Indigenous Educational Caucus on aspects of indigenous education being a lifelong process looked upon as a continuum. He said the very phrasing of the second Millennium Development Goal denied that aspect of the indigenous education concept. The indigenous systems of education must be restored, and the banning of indigenous languages by colonizers must be reversed. But since the beating of children for speaking their own languages had constituted a war against indigenous people, a state of emergency must be declared and government compliance secured with regard to recommendations of the first three Forum sessions.

Tribal lands must be returned, and the Forum must recommend that the ECOSOC use the entire United Nations system to: inform States about the situation of indigenous peoples; assist States in the design of curricula reflecting indigenous philosophies; and support research and data collection by indigenous groups. Where military occupation of native lands continued, protective mechanisms should be developed.

A representative of Tugara Nation/Pacific Caucus called for the Forum to ensure that governments amended constitutions to recognize indigenous languages as legal if they were not at present. She added that the issues emerging from applying the Millennium Development Goals to indigenous issues showed that the only legitimate solution to poverty among indigenous peoples was to put tribal lands directly into the hands of tribes and clans and then make the investment to build the mechanisms to ensure continuous ownership of tribal lands. Land grants should be reviewed, and tribal lands should be returned after 102 years of occupation. Primary education should be redefined so that it no longer reflected the Western view of education but the indigenous one, which held that education was the passing on of the creation story that held nature and her gifts as holy.

An Asia Caucus representative called for the Forum to ensure that the language of indigenous people was recognized by governments and that governments provided the resources to reinstate the language. The Forum should also ensure that indigenous peoples were given the right to choose the script for the language and to participate in the development of textbooks and the training of teachers. Further, the Forum must insure the involvement of indigenous peoples in the design of educational curricula for indigenous children. The use of educational facilities for military purposes must be prohibited, and special attention must be given to the most vulnerable groups among the indigenous people of a country. Finally, the emphasis in the primary education of all indigenous children should be on not creating the conditions for them to be child soldiers.

Opening today's afternoon meeting, the representative of Norway said education was a policy area that the Norwegian Government had placed under the authority of the Saami parliament (an indigenous group in Norway). All Saami pupils could receive instructions in their language, and all Saami in both primary and secondary school received instruction in the Norwegian language. The Saami parliament determined educational content to ensure that it truly reflected Saami culture. Noting that measures were needed to strengthen indigenous education and general welfare, she stressed the importance of a clear and comprehensive recognition of indigenous rights at the international level.

A representative of the Akha Heritage Foundation said the international community must recognize the role of Western religious missions in the destruction of indigenous knowledge systems.

Questioning the role that such knowledge systems could play in indigenous life if they were eradicated, he urged the United Nations to assist in preserving them.

As for education, he said, the Western model had become the default system in many nations. Primary education in his country (Thailand) was mandatory, hindering indigenous children from being educated in their own villages.

The representative of Guatemala noted that about half of his country's indigenous population was illiterate, while only 20 per cent of non-indigenous persons were. Women were particularly affected, with 7 out of 10 women in rural areas illiterate, and the authorities were currently attempting to reduce those deplorable figures.

He said his country had realized the importance of reaffirming the links between educational quality and language, cultural perspectives and traditional knowledge. Attention to culture and tradition in primary education should not stand in the way of quality education for indigenous children of either sex. It should also reinforce the identity of indigenous areas, and reduce limitations under which indigenous peoples laboured in science and technology, so as to empower them to improve their opportunities.

A representative of the Arctic Caucus said that educational programmes in indigenous languages were limited, with approximations of Western curricula still dominating in schools. He noted that 11 United Nations agencies were conducting activities related to the promotion of cultural knowledge and tradition, but that they did not meet the needs of indigenous people. The Forum should call for a seminar to be arranged with all agencies under the auspices of the Forum, with the full participation of indigenous peoples. That should promote a holistic and comprehensive approach to indigenous issues within the United Nations.

A representative of Nigeria-based EMIROAF spoke on behalf of the 16 West African countries belonging to his group. He said the noble aim of universal primary education was far from practicable for his region where the high education drop-out rate was due to extreme poverty. The United Nations should make primary education mandatory for all countries and should provide the modalities and resources to implement that decision. Misuse of funds earmarked for that purpose should be appropriately criminalized.

Speaking for the Andean Community through the FEINE/CONMIE network, a representative said the entire Andean community subscribed to the regional mechanism of the Andean Culture Protection agreement. A round-table mechanism should be established to support its activities.

A speaker for the Bangladesh Indigenous People's Forum said the forest dwellers of his country were representative of what happened to those excluded. Schools had been built with grants from donors, and then the support had stopped. The people believed in universal education but could not come up with money for teachers. Amendments should be made to constitutions to recognize that school venues did not need to be schoolrooms, and education could take place by the side of a stream. Also, that the subjects taught and the language should be appropriate. Advocacy about education was no longer enough for indigenous peoples. Delivery of decision outcomes must be ensured.

A representative addressing the challenge of educating indigenous children in Ecuador called for recognizing indigenous languages in the constitution of countries.

A speaker for the Indigenous Women's Network in South America called for the voice of indigenous people to be even more strongly reflected at the United Nations through the Forum. She said indigenous education should reflect know-how so as to hand down knowledge over generations. Indigenous education should teach tolerance and the benefits of multinational societies. It should foster a policy that helped children stay in school and should educate with wisdom in order to keep both boys and girls in school.

A representative of FEINE/CONMIE said the capitalistic view of education was a major obstacle to indigenous education, and the linguistic integration of indigenous children. Most States in Latin American had bilingual education programmes but often did not include indigenous languages. Many children suffered from an identity crisis and historical confusion. United Nations agencies and indigenous people must establish binding bilingual and intercultural guidelines to educational systems.

A representative of the American Indian Law Alliance said that land and the environment were indivisible from the way of life for indigenous peoples. Providing people with education had been a double edged sword in the past. The colonizer's method of education had disrupted the culture and lifestyle of indigenous peoples. In many communities, the resultant trauma had hindered indigenous peoples more than poverty or lack of development. Poverty was not merely the lack of money but the absence of culture or the ability to care for land in the traditional way.

The representative of the Native Women's Association of Canada said the educational needs of Canada's indigenous peoples were still inadequate. Indigenous languages had been wiped out by residential schools and government assimilation policies, and too few schools used them. In some areas, first languages were becoming extinct. Discrimination against girls hindered them from achieving a full education, which often meant they were doomed to live in poverty. There was also a lack of sexual health services, which threatened sexual and reproductive health. She recommended that education be universally provided in indigenous languages in a culturally appropriate manner, and that it include sexual education.

A representative of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México said educational systems must never lose sight of the student/teacher relationship. Teacher training must be given particular emphasis, since it prepared teachers to meet the educational challenge they would face. Stressing the importance of eradicating hunger and other scourges, he proposed the indigenous peoples form an alliance to analyse multicultural issues facing them.

A representative of the Assembly of First Nations said his group aimed to restore their language to first language status. Without First Nation languages, First Nation cultures could not exist, and First Nation languages could only be completely understood when learned in the context of First Nation cultures. Further, traditional knowledge was the knowledge from ancestors that had been handed down generation after generation and was expressed through First Nation languages and cultures.

A speaker for the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation called for a special rapporteur to be appointed to study the situation of his indigenous group. He said the World Bank should fund a study on protecting the group's rights and heritage. The UNICEF should prepare textbooks that took into account the indigenous culture. Financing should be provided for building art museums and libraries. The Khmer language should be recognized in the constitution.

A speaker for Saulteau First Nations called for recognizing culturally appropriate education as a treaty right. She said the colonial legacy in education must be re-examined and retooled.

Speaking for the Indigenous Tribal Network, the representative said the day's discussion gave the impression that indigenous children were to be shepherded into classrooms to achieve universal primary education. The education proposed in the Millennium Development Goals was supposed to be adaptable, flexible and accessible. Cultural appropriateness was implied in that definition. Would the World Bank support schools that didn't fit its definitions? Would formal Western-style primary education for all people be made part of the conditionalities placed on funding of national projects?

The Caucus of the Caribbean called on States to recognize the rights of indigenous peoples to their own language. He said technical and other types of support should be provided to revitalize native languages where they had been inhibited. The constitutional reforms required to bring that about must be undertaken with the full participation of indigenous peoples. Indigenous people must also be involved in

the constitutional reforms required to restore the cultures, lands, rights and natural resources that had been taken from indigenous peoples.

A representative of the Inuit Youth Council said Canada would be in a state of national emergency if it had a country-wide suicide rate as high as the Inuits, which was, tragically, highest among young men. It was necessary to investigate the causes and symptoms leading to suicide among the Inuits, and determine how it was linked to culture and cultural losses.

A representative of Dewan Adat Papua recommended that UNESCO carry out studies on the importance of primary education in indigenous languages. Relevant United Nations agencies should also ensure that indigenous girls gained access to basic education. Further, indigenous education must be reformed, paying special attention to the cultures and idiosyncrasies of indigenous languages. The UNICEF should assist indigenous peoples in protecting their identities and ensuring their right to be taught in their own languages.

A representative of the Inuit Circumpolar Youth Council said United Nations agencies should support educational needs in recommendations made at the 2004 Forum. Human and financial resources should be made available to study and promote indigenous languages. Moreover, indigenous groups needed support to develop a database and culturally appropriate curricula.

A representative of International Native Traditions Interchange referred to the constant modification of laws to allow exploitation of resources from indigenous lands. The Forum should recommend that governments ratify and implement international instruments on indigenous peoples, recognizing their lands and real owners. They should also ensure the full and effective participation of indigenous people in all processes affecting them.

The representative of the John Jay College Historical Memory Project called on the Forum to bring pressure on the Government in Chile. He said a hunger strike was being conducted against the Government for trying to deprive the indigenous people of their rights.

The speaker for Land is Life said 30 per cent of Ecuador's resources were earmarked for education, but little money went into research on the country's own indigenous people. The Government recognized its responsibility to protect its ethnic groups, but did not provide funds to do so. The Forum should bring pressure on the Government to face up to its responsibility.

The Pacific Caucus of Indigenous Peoples was represented by an indigenous peoples' member from Australia who said UNESCO must improve its working methods regarding indigenous peoples and must develop a policy towards them in partnership with them. The policy should account for a timely delivery of programmes and funding. If UNESCO could not develop such a policy by 2005, the Forum should do so for the organization. Under UNESCO so far, education had turned out to be a tool to promote assimilation of indigenous children. Recommendations had been made to remedy the bias, including through multilingual education. The Forum must monitor the progress being made in education among indigenous children by developing a workable benchmark for measurement.

The Brazilian Indigenous Institute for Intellectual Property was represented by a speaker who said there was a lack of respect for native knowledge in her country, as in many. Nationwide recognition of indigenous rights should include protection of indigenous peoples' know-how. To achieve the Millennium Development Goals in the area of education among indigenous peoples so that education was both multicultural and multilingual, the Forum and indigenous leaders should be vectors for constitutional change at the national level.

A representative of the Hmong World People's Congress questioned how peace and security could be obtained in Laos when women and children were dying each day.

A representative of the Retrieve Foundation said her people had the highest suicide rate in Europe, yet came from one of its most prosperous countries (Ireland). The Government had failed to institute any programmes to protect indigenous cultures, and her foundation had done so without outside funding. Today, it was requesting the Irish Government to amend the country's constitution to uphold indigenous human rights; promote the defence of collective property rights; register Gaelic as a national language; and make available indigenous educational programmes.

A representative of the Indigenous Federation of the Peoples of Laos said people were being persecuted in Lao People's Democratic Republic for learning, speaking and writing in their native languages. The Forum should appeal to the Lao Government to stop all acts of violence so that children could attend school and speak their languages.

A representative of Ka Lahui Hawai'i recommended that UNESCO conduct a formal review on the social and cultural implications for native Hawaiians of the "No Child Left Behind" act in the United States. She also recommended that the Forum support Hawaiian language immersion programmes for native Hawaiians, before the language became extinct. Further, it should urge States to support a special fund to assist native Hawaiians in attending educational centres, such as charter schools and universities.

A representative of the Peace Campaign Group recommended that States introduce a compulsory subject on human rights in schools, so that students could learn to promote and protect such rights.

A representative of the South Asian Indigenous Women's Forum said illiteracy was a clear human rights violation. Many children in South Asia did not speak the mainstream languages in their countries, but were educated in them. School drop-out rates were high among indigenous peoples, especially girls. Education must be redefined for indigenous peoples in South Asia, so that it did not destroy their knowledge, culture and values. Her Forum was frustrated with the attitudes of United Nations agencies, which were run according to national policies, paying no heed to indigenous needs.

A speaker for the World Council of Churches recommended that the Forum work with the UNDP to establish guidelines for States on how to achieve educational success with indigenous peoples. The Forum should also cooperate with other bodies of the United Nations system and all necessary others to ensure accountability and transparency in programmes. Finally, the Forum should recommend the provision of anti-racism education to both staff and students.

A representative of Camarce Ngobe Bugle Regional de Nedrini said educators sent to teach children in his indigenous group in Panama didn't understand the ethnic language. Still, in the modern world, indigenous people had a responsibility to teach themselves how to access the resources they needed. His people weren't asking the Panamanian State for a handout but for an action plan on how it would educate its indigenous people in a culturally sensitive manner. The Forum should urge States to promote and fund bilingual education, where appropriate, and to train teachers who could work with indigenous peoples.

The speaker for the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities said his country had a broad level of ethnic diversity. His organization represented 10 million indigenous people. This was the first time his group was participating in the Forum, and he was grateful that funding had been provided. However, the attitude of promoting multiculturalism was mere lip service on the part of the Government. It claimed that the educational plan was to enhance the ethnic fabric of the country. But how could that be done if the Government insisted that only one language be used?

A representative of the Karenni Student Union called for the Forum to establish a mechanism by which educational standards among indigenous peoples could be measured for appropriateness.

The representative of the Caribbean Antilles Indigenous Peoples Caucus said implementing the Millennium Development Goals in the area of education required that two partners be involved.

Indigenous peoples must be active partners with their countries to develop the curricula and programmes for education that was representatives of all groups at the countrywide level.

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