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SPECIAL ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

There are 370 million indigenous people living in the world today. Most are marginalized and living in poverty.

Why are international efforts to combat poverty seemingly unable to meet their needs? Are some well-intentioned development projects -- such as those undertaken to help reach the Millennium Development Goals -- actually harming indigenous groups, instead of helping them? How are indigenous peoples in various parts of the world trying to protect their land, their language and their culture?

The guests on this edition of World Chronicle are all member of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at the United Nations: Victoria Tauli Corpuz, an Igorot from the Philippines; Mick Dodson, of the Yawuru people in Western Australia; and William Langeveldt, of the Khoe-san of South Africa.

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ANNOUNCER: From the United Nations in New York, an interview programme on major global issues. This is **World Chronicle.** And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle.**

JENKINS: Hello, I'm Tony Jenkins. There are 370 million indigenous people living in the world today. Most are marginalized and living in poverty. But some experts say that international efforts to combat poverty and improve education may not be meeting the needs of indigenous people. That's one topic that is being talked about this year at the UN's Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. One of our guests today is the Chairperson of that Forum, Victoria Tauli Corpuz, and Igorot from the Philippines. Ms. Corpuz, Welcome…

CORPUZ: Thank you.

JENKINS: The United Nations has been trying to push the cause of the world's poorest people with a series of targets called the Millennium Development Goals. And many nations are reporting success in raising the standards of living of their poorest people. But as I understand it, you are concerned that in fact, that doesn't take into account what is happening to the indigenous people. Could you explain?

CORPUZ: Well, you know when nation states want to achieve this goal the way they would like to do it is by saying…ensuring that economic growth happens and therefore, this means maybe more extraction of minerals or oil or gas. Then it can have devastating effects on indigenous peoples because many of us live in areas which are rich with these natural resources. Therefore, this could mean our displacement – the non-recognition – a further violation of our rights over our territories and resources.

JENKINS: So what you're saying is that in order to raise the living standards of the people at the bottom – part of what's happening is that the people who are even poorer than the people at the bottom – the indigenous people – are being exploited even further?

CORPUZ: Yeah, definitely. It's happening all over the world now.

JENKINS: Wow. Joining us in the studio are Mick Dodson, of the Yawuru people in Western Australia…and a member of the Khoe-san people in South Africa William Langeveldt. William, is this an irony that in establishing these goals…I mean how did this happen? Did the United Nations not think about indigenous people when it was drawing up its Millennium Development Goals? Is the United Nations not obliged to look at the standards of living of the indigenous people as a discreet sector of population? Or are you all lumped together in the group of the poor?

LANGEVELDT: Well it seems that we have just been lumped together. There are – as far as I know – there's been no consultation with indigenous people in South Africa. Although in

Southern Africa we have made some progress getting access to land and have some small development projects, generally we've been ignored for all these years.

JENKINS: Mick, is it the same situation in Australia? Australia has very rich natural resources which just happens to be in parts of the country where a lot of aboriginal people still live – have your views been taken into account?

DODSON: In terms of resource development there are probably some positive things in Australia, and one in which the industry is dealing and engaging with indigenous people. I think we probably got the world's best practice in Australia so far as the industry is concerned, but that's....

JENKINS: So as far as industry is concerned...

DODSON: ...As far as mining and mineral industry is concerned.

JENKINS: What makes them best practices? What is it that other people can learn?

DODSON: They take an approach of comprehensive agreements with indigenous traditional [….] of lands where these minerals are.

JENKINS: How does that consultation process work? Because I think one of the issues that often is raised in the context of consultations with indigenous people is who chooses the leaders of the indigenous people themselves?

DODSON: This is what we've discovered in Australia, but we're working through that. And the question of identification of who the landowners are for example - and who speaks for them – is an enormous one. The government gets involved in that primarily by trying to defeat people's claims to land. But as far as the industry is concerned, there's one attitude, so far as the government is concerned there is another.

JENKINS: Are you saying industry is more progressive than the government?

DODSON: Well that's what I found in Australia. It's not perfect, but you know, we've got other nations copying us.

LANGEVELDT: I think referring to leadership structure - I think we need to realize that our leadership and authority structure was destroyed during colonization. And the colonial authorities appointed their own leaders, which was not elected by the indigenous people and of course, this caused tremendous friction and tension. So it is very difficult. But we're also going through a process now where indigenous leadership and authority structures would be

recognized, and then it's a matter of re-building from scratch after hundreds of years of destruction.

JENKINS: So does that mean that before you can even get to talk about some of these crucial issues that are affecting indigenous peoples you have a problem, because you actually don't have spokespeople who really command the authority amongst their own people. Is that what you're saying?

LANGEVELDT: That's what I'm saying – yes. That's what I saying and it's a serious problem in some instances. Yes, there are recognized leaders, but in most areas, there are not.

JENKINS: Does that mean you can have situations where people claim to be speaking for their people and cutting deals that in fact, don't work to their peoples benefit? Is there corruption among the leadership?

LANGEVELDT: Exactly, exactly. But I must also say that our government now has appointed a commission over a five year period that will investigate the entire issue of traditional leadership. And then would give recognition to legitimate leaders that have followers, people that support their leadership.

JENKINS: That's in South Africa where there is a new power structure now after the end of apartheid. Victoria, what about in the Philippines? Do you face these same problems?

CORPUZ: Definitely we do but we are the only Asian government actually, which now has an indigenous peoples rights act and this came about because of the struggles that indigenous peoples have waged for decades. So we do have our […]. The problem is this law gets consumed under other laws like for example, we have a mining act, which gives a lot of privilege and rights to minor corporations, and that is not consistent with the provisions of our indigenous peoples rights act.

JENKINS: Well tell me something…even before we talk about the problems with your own government consulting its indigenous peoples – as Chairperson of this Forum, how could a situation ever arise that the United Nations, which is trying to do so much to help the causes of indigenous people, how could it have reached the situation where the UN would put together a Millennium Development Goals without thinking to take care of the indigenous people to make them a discreet group so you can actually measure their progress and advancements – since they are throughout the world – the poorest people.

CORPUZ: Well I think it's because the United Nations is really a nation state organization, it's a very state-centric organization and therefore they think in national […]. They don't look into the differentiation of the populations within a certain country. So there are people who are really different, they have a different aspiration and view of how development should take place. But that's not taken into consideration because they always think in terms of a national identity, a national development programme – you know, and….

DODSON: I think part of it is also, it's not just this centric view about things. I think it's also ignorance… that the United Nations doesn't know, the system doesn't know - we're starting to penetrate that system. So things like the United Nations Permanent Forum….we're one of two units worldwide of indigenous people in the UN system. One of two, that's extraordinary for 370 million people.

JENKINS: Where do you see the evidence that your penetration is actually starting to have an effect? That people are actually starting to think proactively instead of having to wait for you to come and knock on the door and say…hey guys, you forgot about us again.

DODSON: Well we came and knocked on the door in the 1970's and they let us in and we have a greater presence here now thirty years later than we did then. Vicki and I have been in this for decades….

LANGEVELDT: And I think the positive part is….that's why the Forum is there. The Forum is there to provide expert advice to the United Nations and to help bring the various governments and indigenous people together to form like….

CORPUZ: A UN agency…

LANGEVELDT: UN agencies together.

JENKINS: One of the dynamics facing indigenous people all over the world of course – is how to integrate into main stream culture while preserving their unique identity. Let's take a look now at this clip from the Discovery Channel series, What's Going On?

VIDEO BEGINS:

NARRATOR: Aboriginal people are indigenous…the first people ever to live in Australia. They were the early inhabitants for thousands of years, living on land and water they considered sacred. But over two hundred years ago, it all began to change. Australia was colonized by the British and the Aboriginal people were often treated as a despised and worthless race. Indigenous people everywhere, faced the threat of cultural extinction. When their land and water were stolen by colonizing nations, they suffered persecution, displacement

and humiliation. Over the years, Aboriginal people were systematically stripped of their pride and self esteem. In one programme a large number of Aboriginal children that were believed to be of mixed race, were removed from their families and raised in the white world losing their identity completely. Those children, now grown are called the stolen generation.

VIDEO ENDS:

JENKINS: You know, one of the interesting things about that is… that in fact… what's happening in richer societies and the developed worlds now is that they're moving back to some of the indigenous cultures; they're finding the indigenous culture is actually quite hip in many places.

DODSON: Sexy…

JENKINS: It's sexy as you say….in the United States it's Native American culture. In Australia - a good part of popular culture now in things like fashion, designs, colours are taken from Aboriginal culture. Is that a good thing? Or do you see that as just another form of theft? Is it counter-acting what we just saw in that clip – where in other words -the culture is being strengthened again where it used to be undermined, or is it being stolen and misappropriated?

DODSON: This is a great issue for the United Nations believe it or not. And particularly for agencies like WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization) because ancient designs are getting ripped off and indigenous owners of those designs - some of these are ancient designs - don't get any benefits out of that. We've been…

JENKINS: …Excuse me, but does the benefits you're looking for material benefits? Or are you looking for an acknowledgement to reinforce, to repair some of the damage from the days when you were being stripped of your culture.

DODSON: All of those things. We don't want people using our designs to make money out if it. If anyone should make money out of it, it should be us. Simple.

JENKINS: But isn't culture a way for richer societies, if I can use the blanket term…for 'white people', to find a way in to start to respect indigenous cultures that they…

DODSON: Well, yes and no. But if your intention is to find your way in…to make money out of what we own…that's not wrong.

JENKINS: Would it be ok if in the process or part of the process…they started to adopt or accept some of the spiritual values that go along with that culture, do you see any sign of that happening?

CORPUZ: Well, when we talk of spiritual values it's not something that you easily adopt, isn't it? You really grow with those kinds of values and it comes along with the relationships you have with your land and your community. So it's not an automatic thing that happens by understanding the cultures of indigenous people, so I think that's really the problem with this. Where in the appropriate cultural or indigenous knowledge the whole context upon which those cultures and knowledge are based, is totally disregarded. So, it's really theft because they get that knowledge, they capitalize on it and commercialize on it and then they claim property rights over them.

LANGEVELDT: I think in South Africa also, we've had theft of indigenous knowledge of herbal plants for many, many years. A few months ago, South Africa launched its policy on indigenous policy systems to protect that and also to assist indigenous people in negotiating benefit sharing agreements, with other groups that want to explore that. So to make sure that the resources…once they are taken away from the community…that they would benefit from that.

JENKINS: So what you're basically saying is that you have this knowledge of traditional…say for example herbal medicine, you're trying to in a sense… to patent it, so that you can take some material benefit from it, is that working? I mean, it seems to be me very hard to do…

LANGEVELDT: Yes, well…what I'm actually saying is that we are moving towards protecting this information rather than patenting it and selling it. But there have been efforts - some of the herbs have already been removed and there were some court cases to try and protect them before we got this policy to protect indigenous knowledge and …

CORPUZ: The issue of protection is not really just about patents, it's really about protecting through an intellectual property rights regime, like protecting it by respecting your rights to have control over the resources.

JENKINS: This is a special edition of World Chronicle on indigenous issues. Here's a report on the legal empowerment of indigenous people in the Central American nation of Costa Rica.

VIDEO BEGINS:

NARRATION: Land is central to many indigenous peoples' cultures and lives. It has a spiritual meaning. To the Rey Curre indigenous community in southern Costa Rica, this mountain is sacred, but its existence is now under threat. For generations, the

eight distinct Indian peoples of Costa Rica have been under pressure to assimilate into the mainstream. Many have already given up their traditional dress and languages. Today, only 40,000 are registered as indigenous among the nations' four million population. Most live in the mountainous south. Access to their communities is often difficult and sometimes treacherous. But the area is rich in hydrological resources. Costa Rica's Public Electricity Board is considering a plan to construct a hydroelectric project here. At about 1,000 feet tall, the dam will create an artificial lake, covering 300 square kilometers, affecting 20 villages. Rey Curre and its sacred mountain will be under water. Humberto Mora is the elder leader of Rey Curre.

MORA: "We were born here. If our place is to be flooded, we are ready to die right here. Because our grandparents are here, and our ancestors too."

NARRATION: In a project supported by the International Labour Organization, the ILO, and the United Nations Foundation, thousands of Central American Indians have been trained to learn about their rights. The people in the Curre community are particularly interested n their right to the 'Proper Consultation'. Jorge Dandler is from the ILO.

DANDLER: "Quite frequently indigenous peoples are informed but not consulted. They're informed post facto of a decision already taken. That is not adequate consultation."

VIDEO ENDS:

JENKINS: Of course, this issue of consultation is fundamental to indigenous people. So often in the past you have been invisible and so you have not been consulted. Has there been much progress? Are you being consulted now? You talked earlier about it in Australia, it's going quite well. What's the word from the Forum as a whole?

DODSON: We're always being consulted but that disempowers us… consultations. What the real issue here is… a free, prior and informed consent.

JENKINS: This is one of those slogans of the Conference. Perhaps you can explain it Victoria.

CORPUZ: Well really the basic right of participation – isn't it? You have the right to make a decision over what's going to happen in your own land or your own community and this is the right that has been violated massively both by governments and by corporations. And that is why the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues took that up as one of the key issues to deal with. And last January we had a workshop here to look into the guidelines that have to be created on free, prior and informed consent. And that includes the right to say no.

JENKINS: Right. I was about to say that presumably in the past, when people have said there has been consultations, they have said, we're going to come here, we're going to build a dam – we already have the project put together, we have the money – what do you think? The indigenous people have said no! Actually you are going to flood one of our sacred mountains, and then the answer is tough, we are too far along – and then they've gone back to the capital and say we consulted them, they didn't like it but we consulted them. The process happened, the fact that they said no meant nothing. Is that…

CORPUZ: That's exactly what happened with us and that's where we started our indigenous movement when the World Bank funded a dam project during the Marshall Law Regime, and they wanted to build dams along our community which will really inundate 3,000 indigenous people communities. It started the whole issue and that's why our main issue is really…what is this consultation that you're talking about? It's not just about consultations it's about getting our consent to say yes or no, or to reshape, in fact, the design of a project that you want to bring into our community. As being involved from the beginning up to the end…

JENKINS: Hence the words informed and prior. Before you make any decisions actually come and talk to us.

CORPUZ: And the information is really crucial. Because sometimes the one who gives the information are just the developers and the other side of the picture in terms of adverse impact is not being mentioned so that is really…

DODSON: It has to be free…

LANGEVELDT: And also free consent….

JENKINS: What do you mean by free?

DODSON: Not coerced, it's not threatened, it's…

CORPUZ: Not manipulated…

LANGEVELDT: Yeah… there were no bribes or nothing to get the consent.

JENKINS: That's the sort of experience that you've had in South Africa? Are people there being bribed or…

LANGEVELDT: Yes, not only in South Africa, I mean all over in many, many communities in Southern Africa.

JENKINS: So presumably, this has been something that the indigenous people have rallied behind. Everybody's in agreement on this. Do you see any evidence that in the power

structures that be - both within the United Nations and within your own countries - that there's a corresponding…are the prepared to accept this?

CORPUZ: Well in our country in the Philippines, our indigenous people's rights are contained in an article on that - that we have the right to free, prior and informed consent. But in terms in how it's being implemented that's another story all together because they still manipulate the way this consent is taken. You were saying a while ago…they will create fake tribal counsels who will give that consent. So that's still the situation happening and I think that's why we have to create norms and the UN can really help in terms of doing something like that.

JENKINS: We're talking about the challenges facing indigenous people around the world among them is the problem of endangered languages. Let's look at this third piece of video.

VIDEO GRAPHIC BEGINS:

SUB-TITLES ON SCREEN: I speak my mother's language…The forgotten language…our language…and it was like a light in the darkness. In my mother's land…rain falls once a year in the Kalahari sand…like words of a lost language. There are only a few women (5) in this area who speak N/u. This language is my mother's language…and I love it. The language lives within me…and I'm thankful for it.

VIDEO ENDS:

JENKINS: William, that's the Khoe language. It seems to me that that goes to the heart of this issue of assimilation versus integration…sorry…retaining your independence. It's a tough one because you are members of a nation as well as being members of your own indigenous group. You need to be affective members of that nation as well as retaining your identity. How do you retain that balance? And in fact, I read something recently that struck me as very interesting. It's on the teaching of language. There are a lot of indigenous people who have in recent years encouraged their kids to learn the dominate language of their nation to forget, not use their indigenous language. And it now appears as a result of studies that have been done, that the kids who are forced to do that, perform worse in society than the kids who are encouraged to hold on to their original language. Can you explain that?

LANGEVELDT: Yes, I think that – let me refer to my late mother who in the 1930, she was forced to speak English and Afrikaans and the teachers told her not to speak a baboon language. So people were discouraged to speak their language but now recently, we

approached our state president and he agreed to the idea of mother tongue education. So we have a pan-South African language board with eleven official languages and there's a move now to allocate resources equally to all these languages. Mother tongue education is a priority for our society now. Obviously it brings a lot of resource implications but that is what we hope to achieve so that we can sustain our language, because without your language…

JENKNS: Right…o.k., I understand – but I understand that point. I understand why it is crucial to retain your culture and identity but what I don't understand is why it turns out that the kids for example, who were taught at an early age to use language – English, and were taught in English, have done more poorly as they've advanced through society, than the kids who were taught in their native tongue – which presumably not many people speak Khoe in South Africa. Why is that?

LANGEVELDT: Yes because if you get your education in somebody else's language obviously you can never progress educationally in the same way as somebody whose native language it is. So in other words – the point I am trying to make is it is vital and I think this is something we want to promote within the Forum also. That mother tongue education should be a first language option and then the dominate language should be a second language option. Because you also …

JENKINS: Is there a psychological factor as well? Do you think that people who have been forced to divorce themselves from their own indigenous group by being forced to learn in the dominate language rather than in their indigenous language, become psychologically divorced from their people and are orphans in a way?

LANGEVELDT: There's definitely alienation yes. You become alienated from yourself, from your culture, from your way of life and that has a negative psychological impact because your culture is being damaged. You're not yourself. I think…

JENKINS: So if you can take pride in your own identity from an early age, you can do better later on in life.

LANGEVELDT: Definitely, definitely.

JENKINS: It seems logical now when you say it like that but I suppose for years it has gone against the grain of what societies have been doing.

LANGEVELDT: And it cost tremendous social problems because of that. So we are tying to transform our society now.

DODSON: This is what we found in the National Inquiry in Australia and to the stolen generation that was mentioned in that clip. That those children are forced to…many of them were taken away from their mothers at a very early age. And the only language they knew was their mother's language and they were forced to speak English and…enormous psychological problems down the track.

JENKINS: So in Australia, kids are now learning first their Aboriginal language before being taught in English or do they talk side by side or….

DODSON: No, no…we pretty much take a monolingual approach. Seems to me, the governments there say…well we don't care what you speak at home but you're going to speak English in school from primary school.

JENKINS: Still today?

DODSON: Yes. There are few exceptions of course, in some jurisdictions because the education system in Australia is a matter for the states not the federal government.

JENKINS: So are you fighting that? Are you trying to…

DODSON: Well we're constantly fighting it and we have our language centers, we have mother tongue as an add-on rather than the primary language initially. But we understand the need to learn the dominate language but that doesn't mean to say you sacrifice your mother tongue.

JENKINS: In other words still in Australia, Aboriginal languages are being taught as a second language to Aboriginals after English?

DODSON: No, no, no…that's not what I said. They are not really being taught at all.

JENKINS: …They're not being taught at all…

DODSON: …But there are some exceptions.

JENKINS: That gives us a sense of the battle that you all are facing. Unfortunately that's all the time we have. Our guests have been members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Victoria Tauli Corpuz, from the Philippines, the Chairperson of the Forum; Rapporteur, Mick Dodson from Australia; and from South Africa, William Langeveldt. I'm Tony Jenkins thank you for joining us we invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle.**

ANNOUNCER: Electronic transcripts of this programme may be obtained free of charge by contacting World Chronicle at the address on your screen:

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