



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES INDIGENOUS VOICES

Backgrounder

Indigenous Peoples and Forests

Ninth Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Wednesday 28 April, 2010, 3-6 pm
Conference Room 1, United Nations, New York

Issues related to indigenous peoples and forest management will be the focus of a half-day discussion on 28 April as part of the Ninth Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), to be held at UN Headquarters in New York from 19 to 30 April. The discussion is expected to focus on the following topics: community-based forest management; social development of forest-dependent indigenous and other local communities; and social and cultural aspects of forests. All of these issues are of great importance to indigenous peoples and forests.

Indigenous peoples and forests

Forests cover 30% of the earth's land area. Many indigenous peoples live in forests that have become their traditional territories. Their way of life and traditional knowledge has developed in tune with the forests on their lands and territories. Unfortunately, forest policies commonly treat forests as empty lands controlled by the State that are available for 'development,' such as logging, plantations, dams, mines, oil and gas wells and pipelines and agribusiness. These encroachments often force indigenous peoples out of their forest homes.

Some conservation schemes establish wilderness reserves that deny forest-dwellers their rights. Conservationists' views of nature have thus had serious consequences for indigenous peoples. Indeed, the world's first national park, established at Yellowstone in 1872, involved the expulsion of the resident Shoshone peoples, which led to violent conflicts between the park's authorities and the Shoshone.¹ Indigenous peoples who are cut off from their ancestral lands and territories face poverty, erosion of their customary institutions and loss of identity and culture.

Indigenous peoples who live in forest areas throughout the world have clearly defined rights to land and natural resources that should be respected – such as communal ownership of their ancestral lands, management of the natural resources on their territories, and exercise of their customary laws -- and to be able to represent themselves through their own institutions.

¹ M. Colchester Beyond "participation": indigenous peoples, biological diversity conservation and protected area management <http://www.fao.org/docrep/w1033E/w1033e08.htm>



United Nations



Focus on forests at the UN Permanent Forum

One of the mandated themes of the Permanent Forum is indigenous peoples and the environment. As part of its mandate on the environment, the Permanent Forum has raised concerns and made recommendations pertaining to indigenous peoples and forests.

The Permanent Forum has consistently recommended that the United Nations Forum on Forests and forest-related United Nations bodies, “develop effective means to monitor and verify the participation of indigenous peoples in forest policy-making and sustainable forest management, and establish a mechanism, with the participation of indigenous peoples, to assess the performance of governmental and intergovernmental commitments and obligations to uphold and respect indigenous peoples’ rights.”²

During the seventh annual session of the UNPFII, one of the focus areas of discussion and recommendation pertained to the environment. The title of the seventh session was “*Climate change, bio-cultural diversity and livelihoods: the stewardship role of indigenous peoples and new challenges*”. During the course of the session, a number of issues relating to indigenous people and forests were identified, which resulted in the decision by the Permanent Forum to hold a half-day discussion on indigenous peoples and forests at its ninth session in 2010.

The Permanent Forum is expected to adopt a statement and recommendations at the conclusion of this half-day discussion.

Members of the UNPFII, Member States, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, indigenous peoples’ organizations, non-governmental organizations and media are invited to participate.

For more information on the UN Permanent Forum in Indigenous Issues, please visit:
www.un.org/indigenous

²E/C.19/2004/23

