



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES INDIGENOUS VOICES

PRESS RELEASE

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## UN's Indigenous Forum issues recommendations on climate change and other challenges as two-week meeting concludes

*Economic and social development, indigenous women  
the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples, and  
Arctic region to be the focus of next year's session;  
implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples  
to become a permanent item on the Forum's agenda.*

**New York, 2 May 2008**– At the conclusion of its seventh session, members of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues issued clear recommendations in a range of areas considered critical for the physical, cultural and spiritual survival, identity and well-being of the more than 370 million indigenous people worldwide.

The annual Forum session provides a platform for indigenous peoples to voice their concerns and dialogue with governments and the UN system about their concerns. This year's high-level meeting attracted some 3,000 indigenous representatives and other attendees, including parliamentarians, NGOs and academia, senior and other representatives of Member States, UN agencies and other inter-governmental organizations.


The session's main theme was "Climate change, bio-cultural diversity and livelihoods: the stewardship role of indigenous peoples and new challenges".

At the opening of the session, which began on 21 April, UN Secretary-General BAN Ki-moon, in a video message, applauded the choice of climate change as the special theme, saying that indigenous peoples "can and should play a role in the global response" due to their accumulation of first-hand knowledge of the impacts of environmental degradation, including climate change.

Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Chairperson of the Permanent Forum, said that both the problem of climate change and its solution were concerns for indigenous peoples who -- according to a World Bank report -- contributed the "smallest ecological footprints" on Earth, but suffered the worst impacts from climate change and mitigation measures, such as the loss of land to biofuel production.

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The Forum urged States, the World Bank, and other multilateral and bilateral financial institutions to consider alternative systems beyond the perpetuation of highly-centralized fossil fuel-based energy supplies and large-scale bioenergy and hydropower dams. The Forum called for an increase in support for renewable, low-carbon and decentralized systems, taking into account the recommendations of the World Commission on Dams and recommended that States abandon old, centralized electricity grids, which are not suitable for the challenges of climate change.

Delegates told the Forum that indigenous peoples must have a say in decision-making processes on how to combat global climate change, because solutions currently being implemented are often further violations of indigenous rights.

The Forum made a number of recommendations on the Millennium Development Goals and human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples, among other issues. It also examined the implementation of its previous recommendations.

Delegates also examined the value of increased collaboration of the Forum with the Human Rights Council and its various mechanisms, including its universal review mechanism, and called for indigenous rights to be prominently addressed at those reviews.

Delegates from various indigenous organizations expressed their profound concerns about serious violations of human rights. Ms. Tauli-Corpuz noted that such cases pose a particular challenge to the Forum and highlighted the case of the Guarani people in the Chaco region of Latin America, who have been described as living in slave-like conditions, as representative of “the kind of situations that indigenous peoples are facing”.

Following a meeting it held in Siberia in July last year, the Permanent Forum also decided to appoint Special Rapporteurs among its members to study the impact of corporations on indigenous peoples and promote indigenous peoples’ rights within this context

#### **Topics to be discussed in 2009**


In response to a strong plea from indigenous participants at the two-week meeting, members of the Forum announced that the 2009 session will examine six UN agencies in depth as a new method of work. At next year’s session, discussion will be devoted to economic and social development, indigenous women, the Second International Decade of the World’s Indigenous Peoples and the Arctic.

#### **United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

This year’s session was the first since world leaders adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in September 2007. The landmark Declaration, drafted and debated for more than 20 years, emphasizes the rights of indigenous peoples to live in dignity, to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions and to pursue their self-determined development, in keeping with their own needs and aspirations.

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During the session, Forum members heard from delegates on the multiple ways in which their respective countries needed to take measures to implement the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and discussed how the body could be more effective in encouraging implementation.

The Forum has decided to take a leading role on the promotion of the implementation of the Declaration. It was announced that an international expert group meeting will take place before the eighth session to formulate concrete proposals.

Forum member Lars Anders Baer said the creation of the Declaration and the establishment of the Forum itself in 2003 shows “it is possible to reshape the United Nations.” He also noted that the participation of President Evo Morales of Bolivia, who gave the first-ever address to the Forum by a Head of State, was a positive change.

### **Indigenous Peoples in the Pacific and Indigenous Languages**

The Forum dedicated a half-day discussion to the Pacific region, which is comprised largely of small island states, the traditional lands of many indigenous peoples, and noted that the very existence of many of these territories is under threat due to rising sea levels caused by climate change. The Forum issued a recommendation that an expert seminar be held, and invites the participation of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Special Committee on Decolonization to examine the impact of the UN decolonization processes on indigenous peoples on the UN list of Non Self-Governing Territories.

Following a half-day discussion devoted to indigenous languages, the Permanent Forum issued recommendations intended to raise the prestige of indigenous languages through supporting efforts towards standardization, by establishing indigenous universities and by promoting the use of indigenous languages in public administration. It urged States, UN agencies, donors, research institutions, the media and NGOs to ensure the proper and correct identification of the names of indigenous languages and their protection and development.

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### **NOTE TO EDITORS**

**For more information on the seventh session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, please see:**

[http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/session\\_seventh.html](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/session_seventh.html)

**For daily meetings coverage releases of the Session, please visit:** <http://www.un.org/apps/pressreleases/>

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