



Press Release HR/4839

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Fourth Session
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SPEAKERS IN PERMANENT FORUM STRESS NEED TO MAINSTREAM INDIGENOUS CONCERNS INTO UN POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES

As the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues continued its session today, speakers highlighted the need to mainstream indigenous concerns into United Nations poverty-alleviation programmes, as well as to increase access to education and employment in combating poverty and hunger.

Indigenous peoples should participate in any poverty-relieving decisions that affected them, and poverty indicators developed to reflect their experience, especially if they concerned protection of collective rights, said a representative of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Caucus. Moreover, the Forum should recommend that the United Nations system allocate adequate resources for such participation.

Such rights included the intellectual property rights of indigenous women, according to a representative of the Asociación de la Juventud Indígena de Argentina, which were being adversely affected by globalization. For example, changes in biodiversity were destroying seeds, which forced women to give up farming and resort to markets that exacerbated their poverty. Adding that research projects were also carried out in her region without consent, she stressed that the growth of genetically modified foodstuffs should be limited, and a seminar should be held on preserving the knowledge of indigenous peoples.

Addressing education and poverty, Finland's representative said that lack of equal access to education was part of the multidimensional character of poverty, noting that linguistic barriers had continued to be a major cause of discrimination. As part of its development cooperation policy, Finland had carried out intercultural bilingual projects to contribute to the expansion, strengthening and improving of educational quality among indigenous peoples, especially in Central American and Andean region countries.

Australia's delegate highlighted the importance of reducing unemployment in the fight against poverty by introducing policies to boost the economy and ensure the equitable distribution of benefits, as his country had done. As a result, indigenous rates of unemployment had dropped significantly; private sector employment had risen sharply; housing had expanded; and the number of people completing high school had risen by one third. Governments should adopt broad policies to facilitate economic growth, and ensure that indigenous people had the opportunity to acquire skills needed by the growing economy.

During a morning discussion between the Forum and United Nations agencies, speakers stressed the importance of involving indigenous people in work to achieve the Millennium Goal of reducing poverty and hunger. A representative of the International Labour Organization (ILO) noted that poverty reduction strategy papers were vital tools in reaching that Goal, but that they had often failed to consider indigenous people -- an oversight which should be corrected.

Furthering that argument, a representative of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) said one of the reasons indigenous issues failed to appear in development policies was the failure of governments to recognize the link between ethnicity and poverty. Adding that close collaboration between the Forum and such entities as the Inter-Agency Support Group could lead to a policy declaration on working indigenous issues into development, he said one approach was to focus governmental development policies on the identity and self-determination concerns of indigenous peoples.

A representative of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) suggested that indigenous variables be incorporated into development policy through self-evaluation of such issues as employment. In Latin America, data on indigenous people had low visibility in government policy because indigenous people did not participate in their own data collection, and information was dispersed and unspecific.

Echoing those concerns, a representative of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) noted that conditions of indigenous children failed to show up in government policies due to the lack of disaggregated data. In Mexico, UNICEF had initiated a programme, supported by academics working on a policy framework, to bring indigenous issues to the attention of the policymaking government officials. Improving the condition of indigenous children showed that the best way to defeat poverty was to stop the translation of poverty from one generation to the next.

Other speakers stressed the importance of employing indigenous people in Millennium Goal work, and monitoring mechanisms to assess whether they had benefited from related projects. They also underscored the need to make the Millennium Goals culturally sensitive, respecting traditional knowledge and cultural expressions. The representative of the World Intellectual Property Association (WIPO) noted that the first legal instruments on protecting traditional knowledge were currently being prepared in the intergovernmental forum on indigenous rights.

Also speaking today were the representatives of Canada, Greece, Russian Federation, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Norway, Brazil and Spain.

Agency representatives spoke on behalf of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO); World Bank; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Group representatives spoke on behalf of the Maasai Women for Education and Economic Development/Land is Life; International Indigenous Women's Forum; Asia Caucus; Native Women's Association of Canada; Caribbean and Antilles Indigenous People's Caucus; Rongmei Women Organization; Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation; Yamasee Native American; International League for Human Rights; Defensoría de los Pueblos Indígenas en América collective; ZO Reunification Organization; Assembly of Six Nations; Seventh Generation Fund; and Indigenous Caucus Committee on Indigenous Health.

The Forum will meet again at 10:00 a.m. Wednesday, 18 May, to continue its discussion on eradicating poverty and hunger.

Background

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues met today to continue its discussion on eradicating poverty and hunger, under the thematic approach of "combating poverty; good practices and barriers to implementation". (For background information, see Press Release HR/4836 of 13 May.)

Responses to Forum Questions from United Nations Agencies

Responding to a question on assistance from United Nations agencies to indigenous people in achieving the Millennium Goals, a representative of the World Bank said his institution had created grants for indigenous

people, and had developed a new strategy for extractive industries. It had also examined data relating to the Millennium Goals for five countries in Latin America.

A representative of the International Labour Organization (ILO) added that all United Nations agencies had demonstrated commitment to eliminate poverty, which was the most cross-cutting of all the Millennium Goals. In the United Nations system, the major means of achieving the Goals was poverty reduction strategy papers, which had failed to consider indigenous people in many cases, and should take them into account.

However, United Nations agencies had participated in only part of that process, and lessons learned had not become general knowledge. Also, in many poverty reduction strategy papers, financial or development ministries were involved, rather than the more concerned social ministries.

As to how United Nations agencies had adapted to the Millennium Goals, the ILO representative said they had done so in various ways. Some had restructured, but adaptation depended on whether the agency was already working on Millennium Goal issues and had altered their methods accordingly.

To another query on concrete proposals to involve indigenous people in the Millennium Goals, a representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) said her agency had been promoting the establishment of advisory committees at the national level, which could address indigenous issues. The UNDP also issued its annual Human Development Report, which served as a platform to discuss development issues at the international and national levels.

In response to questions, a representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) said the World Trade Organization had not participated in recent sessions related to indigenous issues.

A World Bank representative said a mechanism would be found this year for spending a \$150,000 grant that had been given the Forum at its 2004 session. Either the Bank would reach an umbrella agreement with the United Nations, or a third party would be designated to decide disposition of the money. A meeting between agencies and the Forum was planned for that purpose. The Bank president would elaborate on Thursday when he addressed the Forum.

Discussion

Speaking for the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a representative said governments didn't yet address the fact that ethnicity was related to poverty and that created structural problems for agencies in working indigenous issues into development policies. The IFAD president was an indigenous person himself and would speak on the issue tomorrow in his address to the Forum.

Outlining IFAD's activities, she said the organization had been created for the purpose of addressing rural poverty to alleviate marginalization. Indigenous peoples were among the most marginalized, and 20 per cent of IFAD funds were directed toward assisting them on all continents in the form of loans and grants. Close collaboration with the Forum and with other entities such as the Inter-Agency Support Group would lead to a policy declaration on working indigenous issues into development. One approach was to focus governmental development policies on the identity and self-determination issues of indigenous peoples involved.

A representative of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) said his news had good and bad elements for the Forum. On the one hand, ECLAC had no formal mandate for a policy on indigenous issues. On the other, the issues involved had begun to be addressed at the request of the Human Rights Commissioner in relation to the conference on racism.

He said self-evaluation should be the basis on which to incorporate the indigenous variable into development policy, such as in relation to employment issues. In Latin America, the data on indigenous people had low visibility in government policy because indicators to measure poverty among the indigenous were half as complete as those measuring poverty among others. It was not so much that information was lacking as that it was dispersed and without specificity since indigenous people had so far not been able to participate in their own

data collection. For example, the impact of education on other social factors couldn't be measured among the indigenous because the national measuring indicators needed to be enriched to account for their conditions.

He said the concept of poverty had a social dimension that resulted from conditions such as malnutrition. It also had a social development aspect from conditions such as lack of access to archives. The two must be linked since human rights, social rights and cultural rights were linked. Collective rights, in turn, were linked with forms of government.

The Chairperson noted that ECLAC was the first regional group to address the Forum.

A representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said her agency had been promoting agricultural development, improved nutrition and food security since it was established in 1945. The World Food Summit in November 1966 in Rome had called for concerted efforts at all levels to raise food production and increase access to food in 86 low-income food-deficit countries. The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, which had been adopted in November 2001, was aimed at the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits derived from their use, for food security and sustainable agriculture. The Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security were adopted in November 2004. The Guidelines were a fundamental step towards pursuing the right to food for the hungry and poor, including those vulnerable groups like indigenous peoples.

Forum Questions and Comments

A Forum member noted that indigenous peoples had experience in implementation and data collection in relation to the Millennium Goals, and had carried out some good projects. Had there been any attempt to coordinate efforts in placing indigenous issues into the poverty reduction strategy papers as quickly as possible? Also, did agencies and States employ indigenous people in their work on the Millennium Goals? What were States doing for indigenous peoples to actually attain the Goals?

Another member pointed out that one could not talk about development without good data and a thorough breakdown of it. The IFAD was organizing projects for indigenous people in the Congo and north of the equator, but data was not available for evaluation. Did IFAD have monitoring mechanisms in place to determine whether the true recipients had benefited from such projects?

Agency Responses

Responding to the question on IFAD projects, a representative of IFAD said his agency's loans did not go to indigenous peoples but to governments, who implemented the projects. The IFAD's only role was to monitor or carry out studies to ensure that recipients were receiving the benefits. As for poverty reduction strategy papers and IFAD cooperation, his agency had started a group involving several international and bilateral institutions to facilitate such cooperation.

On indigenous employment in Millennium Goal work, a representative of the World Bank said his institution was trying to hire more indigenous people. The project had been more successful in the Latin American region, but the numbers of indigenous people employed in Bank projects were also increasing elsewhere.

In response to a question, the FAO representative said he would consult with his home office and report later on the FAO policy regarding indigenous people who wanted to live in voluntary isolation.

Speaking for the UNDP, its representative said the Programme's corporate mandate guided its policy on indigenous issues, and a policy note on the relationship between the UNDP and indigenous people had been published in 2001. The UNDP had a number of mechanisms for working indigenous issues into its own policies and into those of governments. For example, civil society policy advisory groups at the country level brought

relevant matters to the attention of senior actors. The UNDP also understood the importance of disaggregated data in country reports. Its policy for developing and fostering inclusive societies and diversity had been set forth in a 2004 report.

Enumerating specific projects, she said an Asian regional report would be published soon. An indigenous support network had been established, and a policy dialogue had been initiated in South-East Asia, headed by an indigenous director. The UNDP policy on integrating indigenous issues and the Millennium Developing Goals was to promote the Goals among indigenous people while also encouraging coordination of those involved in promoting indigenous issues.

She said the UNDP accent was on localizing, ensuring the full participation of local actors by such measures as decentralizing: getting people to recognize the importance of goals and “scaling up” the activities they undertook to the policy level. The aspects UNDP considered were how indigenous issues could be better integrated; how better dialogue could be achieved; and how implemented activities could be better monitored. Without minimizing challenges, the increased coordination between the UNDP and the Forum was encouraging and the results of the work achieved here should be taken back to indigenous communities.

Speaking for the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), its representative said the WIPO intergovernmental committee was particularly relevant to indigenous peoples. Traditional knowledge and practices were a world cultural treasure, and the mandate to protect them had been renewed after establishment of the Forum. The WIPO process was open to any approach on how to safeguard indigenous knowledge and culture, and approaches would be considered during a meeting in Geneva next month. The emphasis was on including all stakeholders in the dialogue and getting governments to provide voluntary funds for preserving the indigenous cultures in their societies.

The Forum and WIPO had maintained a mutually supportive relationship from the beginning, he said. As an outcome and among other collaborative projects planned, the first legal instruments on protecting traditional knowledge were being prepared in the intergovernmental forum. The two draft instruments were based on the free, prior and informed consent principle. A tool kit for protecting traditional knowledge and cultural practices was available at www.wipo.int.

Addressing the policy of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), a representative recalled there was much more to poverty than lack of income. It involved a deprivation not only of income but also of access to human services. Further, children needed to be cared for if they were to be protected from poverty, but again, income did not assure access if services were not available where they lived. Other factors such as social exclusion could also not be assessed by income measures. Over a billion children all over the world suffered from conditions that deprived them of their human rights without showing up by income measuring standards.

Indigenous children were the most vulnerable in that regard, she said. Their condition did not show up in government policy considerations because disaggregated data didn’t exist. The UNICEF was addressing the problem in a number of ways. In Mexico, for example, a programme had been initiated to bring indigenous issues to the attention of the policymaking government officials. The programme was supported by academics who were working on developing a policy framework. Improving the condition of indigenous children showed that the best way to defeat poverty was to stop the translation of poverty from one generation to the next.

Forum Questions and Comments

Forum members noted that there were many United Nations agencies working in the field of traditional knowledge and its different aspects, such as benefit-sharing and intellectual property protection. Was there a mechanism to coordinate that work?

Others questioned how WIPO was cooperating to update national intellectual property agreements, and how it was responding to the demands of the information society. They also asked for clarification on the difference between indigenous knowledge systems and cultural expressions. One member noted that South Africa

had adopted policies to protect indigenous knowledge systems, and asked what WIPO's contact was with countries that had adopted such policies. Members also commented that indigenous people tended to be catalogued as museum items at international forums, without considering that their cultures were alive, and even innovative.

Participants noted that poverty also existed among aboriginal and indigenous peoples in wealthy nations. Arctic research had shown that changes in traditional diet had led to increased health problems, leading to higher rates of heart disease and diabetes in some areas. High rates of diabetes had been related to rapidly changing lifestyles and nutritional habits that had occurred within the span of a generation. What would the agencies recommend should be done to deal with that problem?

They also suggested that descriptions of indigenous knowledge systems be brought into WIPO discussions, so that they were truly acknowledged. Also, UNICEF had stressed need for disaggregated data and had a relevant project running in Mexico. Would it be replicating that project in other countries, and would it be instituting guidelines in its regional offices for indigenous peoples?

They also mentioned that some nations paid no heed to indigenous-related policies, and questioned whether there was any way of supporting indigenous organizations, especially in Africa, where living conditions were deteriorating in many countries. Also, was there a special mechanism to focus on children exercising their rights, especially with respect to national governments and indigenous peoples?

Agency Responses

A representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said his agency had several outstanding activities and programmes focusing on traditional knowledge, and an attempt had been made by different agencies to follow each other's work. It would be useful to have an overall coordinating mechanism, although certain areas required specific action, such as the development of intellectual property rights. He also commented that indigenous values should not be dealt with as museum pieces, which was why the transition of indigenous knowledge from one generation to another was an important part of UNESCO's work.

A representative of WIPO agreed with speakers that the Millennium Goals should be culturally sensitive, respecting traditional knowledge and cultural expressions. Regarding the information society, WIPO had established links with all national information societies and respected national policies.

In response to a question, the UNDP representative clarified the role of her organization in advancing indigenous issues at the governmental policy level. She said the civil society advisory groups in UNDP country offices were a major force in moving issues up into the policy arena. Other measures included the participation of local actors in the design of country programmes and coordination with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The UNICEF spokesperson said her organization helped indigenous children to exercise their rights through such mechanisms as advocacy and education in realizing rights. In fact, UNICEF's work with indigenous children had disproved the claim that indigenous societies were "frozen" societies without connection to others. The key to integrating indigenous groups into society was to develop and gather disaggregated data. It was difficult to collect that data based on household sampling and self-definition.

The representative of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights said the Office was primarily concerned with elaborating the declaration and had not yet embarked on articulating a formal instrument on the relationship between the Office and the Forum. The 16 independent experts on the Forum, however, could play a decisive role in the theme for the Decade for Indigenous Peoples dealing with traditional knowledge and cultural heritage. As mentioned earlier, the Office had already teamed up with the UNDP on a human rights mainstreaming project in its country programmes. A meeting with forum members at the present session of the Forum would be helpful in targeting further projects at the country level.

Canada's representative said he had three relevant observations concerning the Millennium Development Goals and indigenous peoples: the Millennium Goals were a valuable analytic framework, as well as a plan of action for indigenous peoples; approaches joining national and international strategies were viable to implement; and successful development was increasingly a function of mutually respectful and productive relations between States and indigenous peoples.

The approaches to the challenges facing aboriginal people were the same as those for achieving the development goal, he said. A new partnership-based course had been set in his country last year by the first round table on aboriginal people to renew relationships and close the socio-economic gap between the general population and the aboriginal peoples of Canada. Next Monday, at the present session of the Forum, his country would host an event on approaches to gathering disaggregated data.

Greece's representative said the approach to indigenous peoples' development must be consistent with their own basic cultural concerns while also reflecting the reality of the new global economy in the new Millennium. Two aspects of developmental strategy and sustainable use of nature were relevant to indigenous peoples.

First, she said a development strategy based on manufacturing or a large-scale extraction of natural resources would undermine the relationship between indigenous peoples and their land-related concerns even if it generated significant economic revenue. The successful development strategy would involve extracting and processing natural resources in a way that traditional knowledge provided the solution for how to maintain high efficiency and productivity in small-scale, decentralized enterprises. Second, the principle should be respected that nature's resources could be harvested as long as no species was threatened and nature was left to operate with a reasonable balance of its own.

Speaking on behalf of several Pacific indigenous organizations, including the Rapanui Parliament and Council of Chiefs, a representative recommended that the Forum adopt the recommendations of the United Nations expert on human rights and extreme poverty, especially the definition of extreme poverty, and that the United Nations should use that definition in its work. She also noted that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank still did not take a human-rights approach in their work, and had been directed by United Nations experts to make amendments to their articles. The Forum should endorse previous recommendations from United Nations experts on the approach of those institutions.

The Forum should also work with the Inter-Agency Support Group and the United Nations Development Group to assess risks of Millennium Goal implementation strategies and programmes on indigenous people, as well as their lands and resources. The representative added that implementation of the Goals through globalization was negatively impacting indigenous peoples, and a collective effort was needed to address that problem.

A representative of the Russian Federation said indigenous peoples were actively involved in national projects in his country, including implementation of the Decade for Indigenous Peoples. In recent years, legislation had been laid down governing the relationship between the State and indigenous peoples, including laws to protect their traditional lifestyles and habitats. The State-sponsored target programme method of sustainable development had created additional housing for indigenous peoples, hospitals, schools and reindeer-rearing farms. An important aspect of the nation's northern policy had allowed indigenous peoples to develop autonomously, free from major industrial projects.

A representative of the Maasai Women for Education and Economic Development/Land Is Life said no one had paid for the great contribution her people had made to the rural environment. It was a contradiction that people who lived on lands rich with gold, silver and natural gas could not use those resources even for their existence. The Forum should recommend to key United Nations agencies that they set up new terms of reference to measure poverty. Innovative proposals should be drawn up considering that people themselves must be part of appropriate solutions to overcome poverty.

A representative of Australia said the current robustness of Australia's economy had allowed it to withstand economic shocks that had affected other countries. Its economy had benefited from policies to promote fiscal restraint and balanced budgets, and measures to restrict monopolies, which had been accompanied by policies to ensure the equitable distribution of benefits. People in low-income brackets, including indigenous peoples, had enjoyed relative prosperity. Indigenous rates of employment had dropped significantly; private sector employment had risen sharply; housing had expanded; and the number of people completing high school had risen by one third.

The majority of indigenous people still had a standard of living below the national average, but a growing number had grasped and capitalized on opportunities based on a combination of economic and social policies. She recommended that governments adopt broad policies to facilitate economic growth, and ensure that indigenous people had the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills presented by the growing economy.

A speaker for the International Indigenous Women's Forum reported on the activities of her group. She said that during a regional meeting to discuss the challenges facing indigenous women, the key issues identified were the need to improve the legal mechanisms enabling women to help themselves and training in the United Nations process so that they could access it. Recommendations had been drawn up and would be presented to the Forum. They focused on health, children, environment and economic activities to alleviate poverty. Finally, the Forum should push both governments and the United Nations system to expedite the implementation of measures to resolve the challenges indigenous women faced.

The representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic said his country's long-term development goal to achieve economic growth and social development included the safeguarding of the country's social, cultural, economic and political identity. Two poverty-related programmes were at the top of the Government's agenda: eradication of the opium poppy and clearing unexploded ordnance. The challenges were enormous. The Government could achieve its development goals with international help to benefit all of Laos' 49 ethnic groups who lived in the country in harmony.

Norway's representative said his country would promote the rights-based approach to the development of indigenous people. Structural inequalities must be addressed, along with barriers that kept indigenous people from participating in the society around them. The Forum's recommendations on interpreting the Millennium Development Goals and making them operational should be integrated into international and national plans to achieve the Millennium Goals and fight poverty. That applied to the framework of human rights, as well as to the specific indigenous rights such as those related to land and natural resources and access to culturally appropriate health services.

The Asia Indigenous Peoples Caucus said through its representative that both governments and United Nations agencies should mainstream indigenous concerns into all their poverty-alleviating programmes. Principles to be respected concerning approaches on indigenous people should include the participation of indigenous people in decisions affecting them, such as protection of their collective rights. The Forum should recommend that the United Nations system allocate adequate resources for indigenous people to participate. Also, poverty indicators should be developed to reflect the experience of indigenous people based on consultation with them. Other issues to be addressed included: capacity-building and raising awareness about how to do so; the involvement of indigenous people in post-natural disaster management; conflict resolution; and the use of funds and grants to bring about structural changes.

A representative of Finland said anti-discrimination legislation and effective means of enforcing it were vital in attaining equality to eradicate poverty among marginalized sectors of society. Lack of equal access to education was part of the multidimensional character of poverty, including for indigenous peoples, and linguistic barriers had continued to be a major cause of discrimination. As part of its development cooperation policy, Finland had carried out intercultural bilingual projects to contribute to the expansion, strengthening and improvement of the quality of education among indigenous peoples, especially in Central American and Andean region countries.

A representative of the Native Women's Association of Canada said the deprivation of indigenous rights and natural resources had a negative impact on women, who were the primary care-givers. The international community must address the specific impacts of globalization and the loss of natural resources, compile segregated data, and promote the full and effective participation of indigenous women in all areas of society. Coping with poverty bred violence, which had a particularly harmful effect among children and the elderly, and any strategy to deal with it should consider that. Women were traditionally peacemakers, a fact which should be heeded for the betterment of all indigenous peoples.

A representative of Brazil said his Government had made the rights of indigenous peoples a core of its policies. However, several indigenous groups were still living under harsh conditions, suffering from high child mortality rates, food insecurity -- which the country was targeting through special programmes -- and malnutrition. Measures had been put in place to target food insecurity through special programmes and malnutrition through medical exams, new paediatric units and improvements in food. Programmes had also been initiated to help indigenous people whose territory had decreased due to two hydroelectric plants near their habitats. Regarding education, Brazil had about 150,000 indigenous children at primary and secondary schools, and an increasing number at institutions of higher education.

A representative of the Caribbean and Antilles Indigenous Peoples Caucus said the international community should recognize that indigenous peoples of his region had developed innovative practices for their survival. States must recognize the indigenous rights of the Caribbean people to property rights and access to lands which they have traditionally used to carry out their customary activities. He requested the Forum to reaffirm its call to the UNDP to work with indigenous peoples at the country level in developing and implementing a policy on land tenancy.

Speaking for Spain, the representative said his country had developed a new strategy for cooperation between indigenous people and the general population. It emphasized the rights of people to put into effect their own development models based on their own self-identity. Programmes aimed at achieving equity and social inclusion for indigenous peoples needed to be part of national development policies as a whole but the two main issues to be addressed were the roots of inequity, the lack of both resources and rights. Indigenous culture was part of the human heritage that posterity deserved to have passed down to it because diversity benefited all humankind.

A representative of Asociación de la Juventud Indígena de Argentina said the intellectual property rights of indigenous women were being adversely impacted by globalization. Changes in biodiversity were destroying seeds, for example, which forced women to give up farming and resort to markets that exacerbated their poverty. Research projects were also carried out in the region without consent. The growth of genetically modified foodstuffs should be limited, and a seminar should be held on preserving the knowledge of indigenous peoples.

The representative of the Rongmei Women Organization reported on the plight of women in the south-east Himalayas. She said national development projects had created devastation in the region and had increased poverty. Armed conflict and inter-ethnic clashes had also destroyed the indigenous people's lands, displaced indigenous populations and created untold socio-economic problems and health hazards. The Forum should intervene with the Indian Government and the local groups to ensure the rights of indigenous people such as the Naga. The Forum should also ask States to recognize the right of peoples to self-identity and self-determination; control the ill effects of globalization; protect rights through articulated and enforced laws; put in force policies that precluded forced relocation; and respect indigenous identities.

A representative of the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation said that a lack of recognition of most of Viet Nam's poor had negated the severity of the problem. The Khmers Krom had remained in the lower social class of southern Viet Nam, with little ability to overcome poverty and hunger. They were not recognized as a legitimate nationality, and their homes and lands were being confiscated by force, leaving thousands homeless. Many had been imprisoned without food or water, and others had simply disappeared. Their economic level was limited by their education and profession, and most had little hope of advancement. They practised traditional

agriculture without benefit of technology, with limited export possibilities. Essentially, they were slaves to the Vietnamese.

A representative of the Yamasee Native American stressed that nothing could be built or established without land. He recommended an international credit account for indigenous peoples so that they establish their own economies, customs and heritage. Governments and corporations had established businesses and other institutions on their lands, and their only restitution was unlimited credit. They were the descendents of those who inhabited a country or geographical region before new residents arrived. Indigenous people should have a voice on the Security Council, since many world events were occurring on indigenous lands. To push them aside was tantamount to genocide.

A representative of the International League of Human Rights said nearly all aspects of culture came from land, medicine, food, ceremonies and identity. Losing land was tantamount to losing one's mind. The Government of Botswana had confiscated diamonds on indigenous land, asserting that there were no connections between diamonds and development. Indigenous peoples were dying in camps of diseases, including tuberculosis, AIDS and malaria. The Government was also set to strike a section of the constitution that upheld the right to ethnic and tribal identity. The deck was stacked against indigenous people in their own country, rendering them helpless. She requested that the Forum appeal to the Botswana Government to turn the issue around and ensure indigenous survival.

Speaking on behalf of several Central American indigenous organizations, including the Defensoría de los Pueblos Indígenas in América, a representative said indigenous peoples must not allow the United Nations to manipulate them, as it had been doing. Their cultures were being exterminated, but they were just talking and making suggestions. In three years, he had seen no concrete action. Indigenous peoples must act to implement recommendations that had been constantly repeated. He requested that the United Nations change, develop, have a vision. Perhaps many at the United Nations had never been hungry or walked without shoes. Indigenous people needed self-determination in their countries. They needed to take power, and implement their own solutions.

A representative of the ZO Reunification Organization (ZORO) said numerous development projects had adversely affected the people of South Asia that his group represented. Millennium Development Goals for them should aim at: introducing and conducting primary education in local dialects along with international language; delivering health care through visiting doctors and primary health-care centres; building of infrastructure facilities with sensitivity to indigenous rights; and promoting the integrity and solidarity of whole nations without exclusion of indigenous people or violation of practices such as customary laws.

A representative spoke for The Assembly of Six Nations, a non-treaty group of native peoples negotiating a modern day treaty with Canada and its province of British Columbia. He said his people had been alienated from lands and resources since the days of colonial settlement in the area. The struggle for survival included a movement to protect rights and title, to secure compensation for lands and resources, and to fight for self-determination. Compensation was integral to negotiating a modern day treaty, yet the Government involved refused to acknowledge the claimants' interests. The problem was structural and required the introduction of a new dimension so that the negotiating process would reflect the interests of all. The Forum should support the group to meet its goals.

A representative for the Seventh Generation Fund addressed the violation of indigenous people's rights to the protection of water. She described her group as an indigenous people's organization working directly with grass-roots native communities to design and implement strategies for protection of all rights, including that of protecting sacred sites. She said water wars had begun on indigenous territories. Government and commercial exploitation had besieged indigenous communities, who considered water not as a commodity but a sacred source of life. Her group's recommendations to the Forum were to: appoint a Special Rapporteur for the Protection of Water; ensure full access to indigenous peoples in the 2006 World Water Forum in Mexico; and take steps in the Commission on Sustainable Development to protect water from exploitation.

Speaking for the Indigenous Caucus Committee on Indigenous Health that is part of the Forum, a representative said the destruction of essential environmental and social safeguards from indigenous peoples meant that supports and services were disproportionate to the situations and scale of need relative to other population groups. Her group's recommendation was to: urgently gather disaggregated data with attention to gender, age and rural-urban specificities on the health of indigenous peoples; implement the World Health Organization (WHO) initiative on social determinants of health and reopen knowledge hubs involving indigenous people in their own health care; commit WHO resources to support efforts at regional and international levels; and implement recommendations of previous years.

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