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Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
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PARTICIPANTS IN INDIGENOUS FORUM HIGHLIGHT DISASTROUS EFFECTS OF POVERTY,

CONFLICTS, LACK OF ACCESS TO HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

As the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues continued its fourth session today, participants highlighted the disastrous effects of poverty, ongoing conflicts and lack of access to education on the achievement of full human rights, and stressed the urgent need to complete the draft declaration on indigenous rights.

Describing poverty as a “major obstacle” to indigenous rights, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples, noted that indigenous poverty indices were higher than national averages, and the consequences of poverty were more severe than for other populations. In such populations, poverty referred not only to low-income levels, but a lack of social services and water resources, as well as ancestral lands and other natural wealth.

He added that persistent poverty among indigenous peoples was due to continued denial of their basic rights, stressing that government policies must consider them in attempting to eradicate it, especially the right to primary education. Educational policies respecting cultural diversity and bilingual education were now being implemented, but indigenous completion rates for primary education were still far too low, and linguistic and pedagogical problems had yet to be resolved.

Extending the Rapporteur’s argument to land rights, the representative of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples emphasized the strong link between poverty in many aboriginal communities and the rights to life and land. Quoting a report calling on the Canadian Government to close the gaps between aboriginal and non-aboriginal human rights, he noted the slow pace of settling land claims and the tendency to include clauses in agreements that asked indigenous peoples to give up their inherent rights.

Addressing human rights and ongoing conflicts, a representative of the Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas Región Sud América underscored the tragic results of violence against women and drug trafficking in Colombia’s ongoing war, lamenting inadequate State actions to protect indigenous peoples. Similarly, the representative of the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples highlighted State-sponsored repression in Nigeria. Rich natural resources there had been a source of State-sponsored repression, including shootings and bombings that had killed many indigenous people, including women and children. Calling for demilitarization in the indigenous Niger delta oil-producing communities, he urged the Nigerian Government to ensure the genuine participation of indigenous communities in constitutional decision-making.

Speaking for the O’odham VOICE against the WALL/Traditional O’odham Communities, its representative said increased militarization along the United States boundary with Mexico had led to verbal

attacks on indigenous peoples, unlawful searches, and lack of access to traditional routes. Adding that the United States was constructing fences with no respect for uncovered indigenous remains and artefacts, she called on the Special Rapporteur for indigenous rights to investigate such activities.

Several speakers also emphasized the importance of rapidly completing and adopting the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, expressing frustration that the working group's working methods had held back on adoption of some of its articles. Noting that the United Nations had been trying to complete the declaration for 24 years, a representative of the Grand Council of the Crees stressed the need to lay down some clear criteria, and assist the inter-sessional working group in its deliberations. She suggested that the working group adopt a new and dynamic method of work with the full indigenous participation, and invite the Special Rapporteur on indigenous rights and other experts to attend its formal and informal sessions.

Also today, the Forum focused on the importance of disaggregated data (separate from national and other statistics) on indigenous peoples, noting that it was sorely lacking, although it could be invaluable in addressing indigenous concerns and kick-starting programmes to achieve the Millennium Goals. The representative of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, said statistics for literacy and educational status followed religious criteria, rather than indigenous ethnicity, and that data for public jobs held by indigenous peoples were non-existent.

Also discussed were the Forum's previous themes on indigenous women and youth, with speakers stressing the need to consult women on programmes to meet their needs, improve their sexual and reproductive health, reduce infant mortality, and free women from cultural biases. Regarding youth, speakers expressed dismay at the continuing exploitation of children in some nations, as well as the need for improved education and health facilities. A representative of the Caribbean Antilles Indigenous Peoples Caucus and the Diaspora proposed that the Forum recommend the Caribbean Antilles as a priority area for studies on indigenous urban youth, and that an international youth conference be held in the Caribbean.

The representative of Fiji, Nepal, and Chile also spoke, as did representatives of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

Statements were also made by representatives of Asia Caucus, Pacific Caucus, African Caucus, Assembly of First Nations, Seventh Generation Fund/American Indian Law Alliance, Indian Treaty Council, United Association of Khmer Kampuchea Krom, Russian Association of Indigenous People of the North, Russian Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples.

In addition, speakers included representatives of FEINE/CONMIE, World Adivasi Council, Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas del Estado Brasileiro, Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca, Youth Caucus, Indigenous Children's Caucus, Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Organization, Assembly of First Nations Women's Council, University of Toronto, Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation, Indigenous Peoples Environment, Consejo Indio de Sud America, MIT and United Native Nations Truth Network.

The Forum will meet again at 3 p.m. on Tuesday, 24 May, to conclude its discussion on human rights, data collections, and its previous themes on indigenous women and youth.

Background

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues met today to begin its discussion on human rights, data collection, and the previous Forum themes of indigenous children and youth and indigenous women. (For background information, see Press Release HR/4836 of 13 May.)

Discussion

RODOLFO STAIVENHAGEN, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples, noted that the situation of indigenous peoples was far from satisfactory, despite strides made in some nations. A major obstacle to the full enjoyment of indigenous rights was poverty, which affected such groups more severely than the rest of the world's population.

Indigenous poverty indices were higher than national averages, and the poverty itself was more grinding. Indigenous poverty related not only to income, but to a lack of basic needs, as well as access to social services, water resources, ancestral lands and other natural wealth. Indigenous poverty was a complex picture, which could not be overcome with partial measures, but must be addressed across-the-board.

He said that persistent poverty among indigenous peoples was due to the continued denial of their basic human rights, stressing that any government policies to eradicate it must be based on acknowledgement and respect for those rights to be effective. Among other rights, indigenous peoples required full access to education to emerge from their current situations of exclusion and grinding poverty. Many previous decades had promoted the assimilation of indigenous peoples, but educational policies were now being implemented that respected cultural diversity and bilingual education, although linguistic and pedagogical problems had still not been completely resolved. The goal of universal primary education was far from attained, and fell short of the minimum for indigenous children, especially for girls. The international community must make the quality of indigenous education a priority, and it must be accessible and in tune with indigenous cultures and social idiosyncrasies.

Faced with poverty and educational shortfalls, indigenous people had not stood idly by, but had brought their own creativity to promote educational and social development in their communities. The international community must build on the experience and insights of indigenous peoples in forming educational policy, and the Forum could play an important role in ongoing planning. Governments should redouble their efforts to protect the rights of indigenous peoples, and the Forum could put forward recommendations, such as requesting country focal points to monitor the realization of indigenous rights.

The representative of the Asia Caucus recommended, among other things, that the Forum should monitor the implementation of recommendations of the report on indigenous peoples. He called for the elimination of discrimination against indigenous peoples and the organization of a meeting in that regard with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Calling attention to the increasing militarization of indigenous territories, a violation of the human rights of indigenous people, he said martial law was still imposed in some provinces of countries in the Asian region and recommended that the Forum should conduct a study on the matter, as well as organize a series of seminars on the issue.

The representative of the Pacific Caucus recommended that the Forum support the establishment of a regional office of the Commission on Human Rights in Fiji and that it restate the concepts of self-determination and genocide. The Forum should call for United Nations support of constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples. The Forum should also revisit the issue of decolonization and recommend that Guam be reinscribed on the United Nations list of Non-self-Governing Territories and that the Decolonization Committee assist those territories. The Special Rapporteur should conduct regional consultations in Guam, Fiji, New Zealand and West Papua. He also recommended that the Forum request annual reports on the status of indigenous women in the Pacific basin.

The representative of Fiji, associating himself with statement on behalf of the Pacific Caucus, said that achievements made during the International Decade for Indigenous Peoples could best be summarized as modest. He welcomed calls for a Plan of Action and was concerned at the difficulties in reaching a consensus on the draft declaration. He hoped everybody would do the utmost to present for adoption the declaration. He said Fiji had always recommended a comprehensive approach to the human rights of indigenous peoples. He called for the inclusion of the individual and collective rights of the indigenous peoples in national constitutions and national laws.

A representative of the African Caucus stressed that relevant international human rights instruments should be ratified by African States, including the International Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Gross human rights violations were taking place on that continent, such as the abduction of children for armed conflict, contemporary forms of slavery, and violence against women.

Moreover, free, prior and informed consent (for development projects, for example) should be respected by all corporations operating on indigenous African territories, she said. She called on the Forum to review legal distortions in Africa to determine the truth and ensure that justice was carried out, and to ensure African participation in the Office of the High Commission on Human Rights. The Forum should also work closely with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples.

The President of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations said all relevant authorities in the United Nations should work towards the human rights of indigenous peoples. For last three years, the Group had been concerned with preserving itself, as it had endured difficult times since some States felt it was redundant now that the Forum was operational. However, the Group had been supported by several indigenous groups, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as Economic and Social Council, and the difficulties had been overcome.

The Group had analyzed the work of the two organizations and had determined that their respective mandates did not interfere with each other. Beginning in 2001, the Working Group had begun exploring new working methods, and had documented them. Both organizations must work together with the international community to peacefully resolve inter-ethnic problems, and to alleviate the grinding poverty that marked the daily lives of indigenous peoples, which affected all human rights.

The representative of the Assembly of First Nations said the Special Rapporteur, in his report on the indigenous peoples of Canada, had noted that the economic and social indicators were drastically lower among indigenous peoples than among Canadians in general. Among the priorities in advancing the human rights were housing and the right to self-determination. Implementation of the right to self-determination would provide the First Nations with the resources and capacities to advance their interests. Aboriginal rights had no “sunset” in Canada, he said. He called on the Government of Canada to abolish its repressive policies. He endorsed the report’s recommendations regarding land access and access to resources for the First Nations.

The representative of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples said the report recognized that the Government in Canada had many programmes and financial funds to consider the problems of aboriginal communities but also noted that, in some cases, the Government of Canada had contributed to impoverishment. The report called on Canada to do more to close the gaps between aboriginal and non-aboriginal human rights. There was a clear link between poverty in many aboriginal communities and the rights to life and land. There was a slow pace of settling land claims and a tendency towards inclusion of clauses in agreements asking indigenous peoples to give up their inherent rights. He called on the Government of Canada to protect the right to life and resources of aboriginal people. As Canada had the reputation of pleading for human rights internationally, the Government had a responsibility to show leadership and quickly implement the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur.

The representative of the Seventh Generation Fund/American Indian Law Alliance said many indigenous peoples had been highly frustrated by the working methods of the Chair of the Working Group. It had held back adoption of some articles that were near consensus. He asked the Permanent Forum to recommend to changes in the Working Group’s methods of work, including adding an indigenous co-chair, and that sub-working groups continue to be co-chaired by an indigenous and a State representative. The provisions receiving overwhelming support should be promptly, albeit provisionally, adopted.

A representative of several indigenous groups, including the Indian Treaty Council, referred to indigenous groups who were unable to attend United Nations sessions on the declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, but would be impacted by their outcome. She called on the Forum to reaffirm that the declaration's subcommission text would continue to be the basis of future discussion; and that the declaration would not be adopted without indigenous peoples' free, prior and informed consent. Further, the intersessional working group should agree on a new and dynamic method of work; discuss all articles in the text that violated human rights law; and discuss proposals for additional changes that clarified or extended the text.

A representative of the Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas Región Sud América pointed out the harmful effects of the ongoing war in her country (Colombia) on indigenous peoples, including persistent violence against women, and ongoing drug trafficking. Actions by the State had been inadequate in protecting indigenous peoples, who were seeking special protection from the United Nations Human Rights Commission. Among other actions, a monitor should be appointed to check Colombia's compliance with international human rights instruments, as well as with the social and cultural rights of indigenous peoples.

A representative of O'odham VOICE against the WALL/Traditional O'odham Communities highlighted incidences of increased militarization along the United States boundary with Mexico, which had led to human rights violations against her people. Those included verbal attacks, unlawful searches, and lack of access to traditional indigenous routes. The United States was constructing fences with no respect for uncovered remains and artefacts in traditional burial grounds. She called on the Special Rapporteur for indigenous rights to investigate such proceedings, recommending that he deal directly with indigenous leaders.

The representative of the United Association of Khmer Kampuchea Krom asked the Permanent Forum to acknowledge her people as an entity with problems of religious prosecution and land confiscation in Viet Nam and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, leaving thousands of its people homeless. Freedom of movement was prohibited, and advanced education was denied. Only six people out of a population of 8 million had received a master's degree. She said many of her people disappeared because of political involvement. Indigenous women and children were abused. Wrongly accused people were in prison without trial, and freedom of expression was denied. She recommended that human rights violations in Viet Nam and the Lao People's Democratic Republic be investigated and documented case by case, and that a report on that matter be disseminated among her people.

The representative of the Russian Association of Indigenous People of the North said it was important to research the extent to which States were, in their legislation, recognizing the rights of the indigenous peoples. Many States, among them the Russian Federation, had signed treaties regarding the rights of native peoples, but had not ratified them. The Human Rights Commission had determined that further research was necessary on the constitutional rights of the indigenous peoples. He had asked the Special Rapporteur to visit the Russian Federation in 2004, native rights had been removed from some legislation. He called on the Permanent Forum to work closely with the Rapporteur to adopt the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur.

The representative of the Russian Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples said that after the "perestroika", the Constitution guaranteed the rights of small groups of indigenous peoples. However, regional legislation in that regard was outstripping federal regulation. The major shortcoming was that they focused on small indigenous issues and not on the political will of local authorities and the availability of financial resources. Those people that had not had the good fortune of having good leaders -- or oil -- were relying on the Federal Government. However, last year more than a hundred federal laws had been amended, and the 1999 framework law on safeguards of small group of indigenous peoples had been drastically revised. Now regions had lost the right to adopt laws on land use for small indigenous peoples. Free access to forestry resources for indigenous peoples had also been lost.

The representative of the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples spoke on behalf of the indigenous communities of Nigeria that were home to the richest natural resources in the world. Unfortunately, he said, those natural resources had been a source of State-sponsored repression, of which he gave many examples, including shootings and bombings of villages, resulting in killings of indigenous peoples, including women and children. He called for the demilitarization of the indigenous Niger delta oil-producing communities and recommended, among other things, that the Nigerian Government ensure the genuine participation of indigenous communities in the constitutional decision-making process. He also recommended that the indigenous communities be consulted in the execution of gigantic projects which threatened their ecosystem. The European Union should ensure respect for human rights in the granting of aid to the Nigerian census project.

A representative of several indigenous groups, including FEINE/CONMIE, recommended that the Special Rapporteur on indigenous rights should encourage States receiving women migrants to respect their cultures and values, and urge States to comply with the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of migrant women. Further, States should attune their laws with international human rights instruments; draw up laws to give work in the home a dignified status; and set up bodies of leading indigenous leaders to monitor the realization of indigenous peoples' rights.

A representative of the Bangladesh Adivasi Forum noted that serious human right violations were occurring in his country, including the house-burnings and rape. Moreover, many United Nations peacekeepers were violating human rights, and new areas were being taken over for army camps and training centres. Adding that a national ombudsman and proposed human rights commission were still lacking, he called for United Nations support in monitoring the human rights situation in Bangladesh.

A representative of the World Adavasi Council said the situation for indigenous peoples had been deteriorating steadily, despite efforts by the United Nations to assist them, and a thorough investigation must take place to reverse that trend. He recommended that full indigenous participation and freedom of choice occur in development activities; that international assistance be monitored to ensure that it reached indigenous people; and that the international community draw up a worldwide plan to protect forests.

A representative of the Grand Council of the Crees recommended that the Forum urge the working group on the draft declaration concerning the rights of indigenous peoples to uphold the United Nations Charter and adhere to international law. The working group should adopt a new and dynamic method of work with the full participation of indigenous peoples and invite the Special Rapporteur on indigenous rights and other experts to attend formal and informal sessions of the working group. She noted that the United Nations had tried to adopt the draft declaration for 24 years and stressed that the time had come to lay down some clear criteria and assist the intersessional working group in its deliberations. The knowledge and findings of the Special Rapporteur and other experts were needed at the working group's sessions to resolve outstanding differences.

Questions and Answers

Forum members argued in favour of international and national recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and inclusion of those rights into all aspects of the Millennium Development Goals. They asked for a partnership between governments in organizations representing indigenous peoples regarding their rights to self-determination and control of natural resources. Concerning the Special Rapporteur's suggestion to establish focal points on indigenous matters within United Nations country teams, a member asked if country teams were present in all countries with indigenous peoples. Another Forum member asked how effective national human rights institutions addressed violations of the rights of indigenous peoples. Questions were also asked regarding the isolated situations in which many indigenous people found themselves.

One Forum member noted that attaining the Millennium Development Goals, including those concerning the elimination of poverty, were at the heart of the current debate, but she stressed that

economic and political issues should also be addressed, as they served as sources of conflicts. Many of those issues reflected colonial features. Referring to ongoing “genocide and ethnocide” in Colombia, she called for United Nations mechanisms to eliminate the militarization of indigenous peoples’ lands.

Another Forum member drew attention to the misconception that the problems of indigenous peoples in rich and developed nations were effectively addressed. Forum members further noted the need for national curricula on indigenous peoples’ cultural and philosophical heritage and for the mass media to stop depicting indigenous people as “cartoon figures”. Questions were also asked regarding coordination between the various Special Rapporteurs on various issues, including the right to food.

Responding, Mr. STAVENHAGEN, the special Rapporteur, said the three areas within the United Nations system devoted to indigenous peoples should encourage the Organization to focus on indigenous issues. There was no rivalry between the Forum, the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, and the Special Rapporteur on indigenous rights. Each area had a specific mandate and its own legitimacy within the system. The areas complemented each other in their activities, and the three mechanisms had tried to coordinate their efforts.

He said that, regarding continued violence suffered by indigenous peoples, the international community should pay increased attention to procedures and mechanisms for diminishing the levels of violence and preventing ethnocide in countries where indigenous peoples were victims.

He said he was optimistic that progress would be made on the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples at the beginning of the newly inaugurated Second International Decade for the World’s Indigenous Peoples. As for increasing cooperation during the Second Decade, an attempt must be made to involve United Nations agencies, as well as the Human Rights Commission, in the Decade’s activities.

A representative of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs said the social and demographic branch of her division had been working with indigenous peoples to review the existence of disaggregated data for indigenous peoples. Some countries had included specific questions on census forms to determine whether respondents belonged to indigenous groups, or to which ethnic group they belonged. Adding that the Division had also reviewed the extent certain populations were excluded, she said the findings from its report would be included in the demographic yearbook special topic section. Some data was already being displayed on the Internet, and data would be soon be added on religion.

A representative of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), speaking on behalf of the Director of the UNFPA’s Latin American division, said governments had acknowledged that focusing on health and gender was central to reaching the Millennium Goals. Investments in population were vital to improve the health of children, treating HIV/AIDS, and encouraging sustainable development. Making those goals a reality depended on local ownership for projects, and an enabling environment, which should consider economic, social, and political factors, as well as racism and discrimination.

He added that poor people in indigenous communities worldwide had the least access to education and health care, keeping them in a vicious cycle of poverty from one generation to the next. The UNFPA was designing questions to separate out indigenous statistics from other groups in Central America. It also had a close partnership with the Continental Partnership of Indigenous Women, had stepped efforts to obtain gender and ethnic disaggregated data, and was analyzing emerging population trends and ageing, which would have implications for indigenous populations.

The President of the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, said cooperation among the three groups dealing with indigenous issues could indeed be stepped up, but such cooperation must start by recognizing the importance of acknowledging at the national and international levels the rights of indigenous peoples. If those rights were not acknowledged, there could be no reduction of poverty among indigenous peoples. The first time the three groups had acted in concert was in 2000, when the two

Chairmen and the Special Rapporteur had written a letter urging everyone involved in negotiations on the issues to wrap up their work.

Cooperation could also be galvanized on possible help in negotiations on the declaration. The Working Group had formally expressed its readiness to do so, he said, but first, there should be a formal request. He agreed that advantage should be taken of every mechanism available in the system, including the Treaty Bodies. Those bodies had gotten a request from the Commission on Human Rights asking them to pay attention to the situation of the indigenous peoples.

JULIAN BURGER, representative of the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, said that in taking the work regarding indigenous peoples' issues forward, the Office would try to engage countries. As for the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur, he said the Office had to look at how those recommendations could be turned into projects on the ground. The Office had started work on that in two countries in Latin America. In trying to move forward for a general national programme of human rights, however, all recommendations of all Special Rapporteurs had to be taken into account. National human rights institutions would do well to include indigenous perspectives and indigenous staff in their work. The Office also helped UNDP to reflect better human rights and indigenous rights. The Office was looking at a mechanism that would give indigenous peoples an opportunity to participating in country teams.

Strengthening of mechanisms and policy development was another issue, he said. The Office was looking at guidelines for the private sector. There was also potential to exploit better other mechanisms that were less obvious, such as the Special Rapporteurs on adequate housing and the right to food. Indigenous peoples needed to be encouraged to better use the existing special procedures, as well as the Treaty Bodies. A third area for Office involvement was capacity-building for indigenous peoples and government institutions. He proposed that members of the Permanent Forum spend some time with the agencies to see how policy frameworks were developed and giving feedback. The knowledge available within the Permanent Forum had not really been used for substantive input. The Office could assist in cooperation between the several mechanisms. He invited Forum members to spend some time in the Office, to get to know the Office better and to give the Office an opportunity to use available knowledge.

CONRAD HUNTER, of the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, said the Convention recognized the linkage between biological diversity and traditional knowledge. At its second meeting, the Permanent Forum had invited the Convention's secretariat to conduct a workshop on environment and cultural diversity. Such a workshop would be held next week in Japan, with strong representation of indigenous peoples. Convention staff was also working on a code of ethical conduct in areas occupied by indigenous peoples. He hoped that a draft code could be negotiated in 2006. Negotiation of an international regime on access to genetic resources was important too. He encouraged members of the Permanent Forum to take an interest in that issue, because it provided an opportunity to ensure that traditional knowledge would be protected.

Discussion

Regarding the Convention on Biological Diversity, Forum members noted that many States were formulating legislation on access and benefits and asked what the status was regarding national legislation on benefit-sharing for indigenous peoples. Sovereignty over natural resources by indigenous peoples was the important issue to be pushed within the Convention on Biological Diversity they said.

Forum members also stressed the importance of disaggregated data as a crucial tool to formulate policies in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, particularly for the marginalized members of civil society, including indigenous peoples. They asked whether the Statistical Division had taken particular steps to speed up its work and whether it had urged States to provide the necessary disaggregated data also, had the Division worked with other agencies in that regard. Another question concerned registration of indigenous peoples who had been born outside their region.

Questions and Answers

Forum members questioned whether the Statistical Division had taken steps to speed up the issuance of disaggregated data, and whether it had worked with other agencies to formulate statistical tools and methods for such data.

Responding, the representative of the Statistical Division (DESA) said it had been collecting census data from specific countries. The general guideline was that countries themselves made decisions based on their needs, consulting with groups at risk of being enumerated. The Statistical Division followed, rather than imposed, national practices and reported on their activities.

As for the Millennium Goals, she continued, work on those objectives was not focusing on disaggregated data by ethnic background, only aggregated data.

To another query on traditional knowledge and the draft declaration, Mr. Hunter said his organization had just concluded a workshop with the African Group on traditional knowledge, which had come up with several recommendations to forward to the working group on the draft declaration.

One Forum member introduced the report (document E/C.19/2005/3) on the International Workshop on Methodology Regarding Free, Prior and Informed Consent of Indigenous Peoples, an issue that had been identified by the Forum as a priority. The Workshop had been held from 17 to 19 January, and was attended by 67 experts and observers of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations, governments and indigenous organizations. Free, prior and informed consent was viewed as a principle based on the human rights approach to development. It was designed to develop relevant policy frameworks at the agency level, including the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), Policy Strategy Development Papers and Millennium Development Goals. It had been emphasized that such consent was essential for achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

He said the workshop had concluded, among other things, that it was imperative that the views of indigenous peoples should be at the centre of policies for implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. It had recommended that the Permanent Forum should be invited to participate in the efforts of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations concerning free, prior and informed consent. Governments, the private sector and indigenous peoples should be aware of the principles of consent when planning development projects. The inter-agency support group on indigenous issues should develop a handbook on indigenous issues for United Nations country teams. Case studies should be undertaken to analyse current practices on free, prior and informed consent.

Another Forum member, noting that the work of DESA did not reflect the data that indigenous peoples wanted, asked that the Statistical Division provide training to national statistical commissions. National statistical institutions had used data from which the indigenous people were missing. She also called for coordination of the Division with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

Discussion

The representative of Nepal said indigenous groups had been active in protecting and promoting their identities in his country, and so far the Federation of Indigenous Nations had recognized 59 indigenous groups. The statistical bureau issued figures based on caste, ethnicity and mother tongue, but still lacked disaggregated data by indigenous group. The first United Nations Decade on Indigenous Peoples had helped bring indigenous issues to the attention of planners and administrators in the country.

He stressed that work on the Millennium Goals should be revised to ensure the full participation of indigenous peoples in reaching those objectives. Further, he recommended the use of disaggregated data in

adopting policies; that mechanisms be strengthened and tools set up for the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples; and that governments adopt a human rights approach to implement and monitor the Millennium Goals.

A representative of the Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, said it was unclear how much data on indigenous peoples in his country was publicly available, and how much had been secretly filed. Available figures were inaccurate, representing gross underestimates in some cases. When it came to literacy and educational status, data followed religious criteria, rather than indigenous ethnicity. Official statistics for public jobs held by indigenous peoples were unavailable in a disaggregated form. He recommended that the State pay more heed to disaggregated data for indigenous peoples, and that United Nations agencies take measures to consider indigenous peoples' issues.

The representative of Chile said his country had ensured that economic development was consistent with the social development of its citizens. Major efforts had been made regarding the right to land, and a special programme had been initiated for indigenous people, which aimed to increase access to land for young married men and women. The country had also identified nine major areas for indigenous development, which constituted almost 8 per cent of its land. In addition, it had supported entrepreneurship by sponsoring young entrepreneurs in sparsely populated areas of national parks to promote ecotourism.

The representative of the Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas Región Sud América said the indigenous young people of South America recommended to States that priority be given to quality education, including on their own cultures, and that they also focus on sexual and reproductive health. They called on States to pay particular attention to young people affected by violence, in particular indigenous peoples. They also recommended that States implement programmes that prevented sexual exploitation. To make the Millennium Development Goals, reality young people, adults, organizations and States must work hand in hand to build a more decent society marked by solidarity, she said.

The representative of Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas del Estado Brasileiro said the Millennium Development Goals afforded an opportunity to implement policies that guaranteed the full participation of indigenous peoples. Indigenous women should be consulted regarding programmes to meet their needs, and their culture should be respected. States must comply with International Labour Organization (ILO) Covenant 169, including provisions for free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples. The sexual and reproductive health of women must be improved, and maternal mortality reduced. Governments must make resources available for the participation of indigenous women, and should support national and regional initiatives to benefit them.

The representative of Russian Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples said that in order to address the problems of indigenous peoples, data must be available, to be provided by national institutions. There was also a need for disaggregated data. Indigenous people often lived in sparsely populated areas and did not receive adequate information. Some countries, like the Russian Federation, were home to several indigenous peoples, and data on each of those groups was needed, regardless of their size as a group. The participation of indigenous peoples' representatives at all stages of research would help in that regard. He proposed that indicators be established to collect comparable information on indigenous peoples in various countries and recommended that the United Nations carry out a study on the quality of life of indigenous peoples.

The representative of the Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca drew attention to the situation of the Cauca area in Colombia, asking for improved living conditions for the people living there. The indigenous peoples of Cauca had a unity structure based on customs aiming to protect their territories. That structure often clashed with the State's development policies. The region also suffered from attacks on its territories from insurgents and counter-insurgents. Houses were destroyed, and mass arrests were made. He requested that the Indigenous Guard be recognized as an international peace agent and that a Special Rapporteur be appointed for the Indigenous Peoples in Colombia. He also called for action at the highest international levels to reach an immediate ceasefire.

A representative of the Pacific Caucus recommended that the Forum ensure the accessibility of indigenous data to the groups concerned; that the World Bank and other relevant institutions ensure that indigenous peoples had access to data on their communities; that the United Nations make better progress on collecting disaggregated data in the Pacific region; and that the Organization support workshops in the Pacific region on data collection.

A representative of the Youth Caucus said indigenous communities faced the risk of cultural and economic deprivation, if not extinction. Stressing that violation of their lands had impinged on indigenous rights, she said indigenous peoples were not afforded the same basic rights as the rest of the population. She recommended that United Nations agencies review and implement previous recommendations by indigenous youth, and conduct training programmes on how to navigate the United Nations system, especially on treaty bodies.

All United Nations agencies should pressure governments to provide indigenous peoples with the same basic rights that were provided to all human beings, she said, calling on the United Nations to review, implement and fund all past recommendations to promote indigenous rights.

A representative of Indigenous Children's Caucus/CORE Manipur – Indigenous Children said it was increasingly important that indigenous peoples take responsibility for indigenous children's rights. His group had requested support from governments and United Nations agencies to promote children's rights, but it would do so regardless of any contributions from other organizations. He encouraged input on indigenous children from indigenous peoples worldwide, and requested the Forum to ask the Inter-Agency Support Group to support the participation of indigenous peoples in a workshop on health concerns and basic education.

A representative of the Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Organization described the critical situation of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh, due to the ongoing militarization and exploitation of ancestral lands. He suggested that the Forum develop mechanisms to monitor and implement recommendations of the past two sessions, and request United Nations agencies to submit progress reports on implementation of recommendations. In addition, the United Nations should extend the Asian regional indigenous people's programme to other regions and strictly monitor records of army personnel before allowing them to participate in peacekeeping operations.

The representative of the Assembly of First Nations Women's Council said gender issues of indigenous peoples were often not addressed. However, indigenous women of the First Nations in Canada were often marginalized and faced multifaceted discrimination. Women were often the poorest in indigenous communities. First Nations women were still at the lowest rank in terms of social indicators and faced the highest risk of violence. Indigenous women held particular knowledge of ecological linkages and fragile ecosystems and had often taken the lead in protecting the environment. The empowerment of First Nations women was vital to the future cultural and spiritual well-being of all First Nations people.

The representative of the Caribbean Antilles Indigenous Peoples Caucus and the Diaspora, said the Caucus called on the Forum to request the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to organize human rights training for indigenous and political leaders. The Caucus also called on the Forum and relevant agencies to commence dialogue in the use of the "St. Lucia model approach" for data collection on Eastern Caribbean States. It asked that the Forum recommend to the United Nations the organization of a workshop on data collection for Caribbean people. He proposed further that the Forum recommend that the Caribbean Antilles be one of priority areas on studies for indigenous urban youth and that an international indigenous youth conference be held in the Caribbean.

The representative of the University of Toronto drew attention to the Yakaghir, living in Yakutz in North Asia, a small group living on the brink of ethnic catastrophe. She said that it was ironic that the area was known for the discovery of a mammoth, but that no one expressed any sorrow about the people living

there. They suffered from poverty, as the reindeer stock, the main diet, had been reduced. Living in arctic conditions, men had been overcome by depression and alcoholism; women were left without providers; and there was an increase in number of single mothers. She was afraid that the people would disappear totally in the next generation.

A representative of the Khmer Kampuchea-Krom Federation said Khmer women were treated with disrespect and discriminated against in Viet Nam. She requested the Forum to conduct investigations into the plight of Khmers women and implement programmes creating access to health information, as well as disease prevention programmes. The United Nations should create and implement projects of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in their territory; assist women in securing education; and collaborate on creating jobs for indigenous women, so that they could avoid trafficking and other forced labour.

A representative of the Indigenous Peoples Environment said her people were affected by the post-traumatic slave syndrome, and lamented the lack of any treatment for it. They were still forbidden to be who they were as Africans, to embrace their customs and culture. Enslaved African women had to give birth to children in the holds of ships, chained and shackled together. It was a wonder any captive, survivor African had any semblance of sanity left.

She said captive, African survivors who dared to acknowledge their African identity were penalized and ostracized in society, and must regain their dignity and place in the world. Many African slaves were whipped and deeply cut by bullwhips, and their children whipped until they spoke the language of their captors.

A representative of the Consejo Indio de Sud America said many indigenous peoples would not reveal their ethnicity in statistical questionnaires because were afraid of being denied jobs or assaulted. Racism was a problem in many nations, and many indigenous people who had the resources changed their names and identities. New statistics could have an adverse effect, since many had left their ancestral lands and now lived on the peripheries of cities. Indigenous peoples did not just live in the jungle.

The representative of MIT, an indigenous organization in Peru, drew attention to the fate of indigenous children who often were exploited from age five on in the mining industry and had no access to education. Some children had to walk 15 to 30 kilometres to reach a school. Indigenous women in the mountainous areas did not have employment or access to information, and were treated as creatures without any humanity. He asked that the Forum recommend to the Government of Peru that greater respect be paid to indigenous women and girls and provide education free of charge.

The representative of the United Native Nations Truth Network said the native people of North America were being systematically dismissed and expelled from their homelands. They faced destruction of their cultural existence. The Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs had interfered in the affairs of the United Native Nations. Millions of dollars were made in gambling on behalf of the United Native Nations, but the people were not benefiting from it.