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Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Fourth Session
12th & 13th Meetings (AM & PM)

SPEAKERS IN PERMANENT FORUM URGE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, GOVERNMENTS, UN AGENCIES

TO DEVELOP CONCRETE PROPOSALS TO IMPROVE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' LIVES

As the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues continued the fourth session today with a discussion on its future work, speakers urged indigenous communities, Governments and United Nations agencies to draw up concrete proposals to improve indigenous lives and preserve their rights during the newly inaugurated Second International Decade on the World's Indigenous Peoples.

Several participants emphasized that key aims of the Second Decade -- approved by the General Assembly in 2004 under the theme "partnership in action" -- should be to safeguard indigenous peoples' rights to land and natural resources, and to promote indigenous intellectual property rights and traditional knowledge. In addressing those concerns, they also highlighted the urgent need to complete and adopt the pending draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

Addressing the indigenous land issue, the representative of the Latin American Caucus noted that lands and water resources were under constant threat in his region, due to mining, privatization and forestry. Pressing for governmental recognition of indigenous peoples and their rights to natural resources on their territories, he emphasized the need to stop uncontrolled development and protect traditional knowledge.

Echoing that concern, a representative of the Innu Council of Nitassinan noted that indigenous peoples lived in marginalized poverty because they had been deprived of their resources lands, culture, way of life and dignity. Stressing that the era of colonialism was over, he insisted that intolerance and resistance to legitimate claims must end. In focusing attention on that issue, a representative of Sauleau First Nations recommended that the Second Decade include seminars focusing on indigenous treaties and land rights, and that the Special Rapporteur on indigenous rights initiate a study on the impact of contemporary colonialism.

Lamenting the lack of progress on indigenous issues during the First Decade for indigenous peoples, participants also underlined the need to improve the Forum's working methods, and set up country-level focal points at United Nations agencies to follow up Forum recommendations and coordinate Second Decade activities. A representative of the Pacific Caucus recommended that the Forum encourage States and indigenous peoples to develop national commissions and action plans for the Second Decade, and organize joint meetings between members of the Forum and national committees.

According to a representative of the Indigenous Youth Caucus, the Second Decade would also be better served if youth were better represented in its activities. She recommended that a seat on the Forum be allocated to indigenous youth; that the Secretariat hire a young indigenous staff person to focus on

youth; and that the Forum ensure resources to bring two youths to each year's Forum. She also urged the Forum to facilitate a fund for indigenous youth activities, and called on United Nations agencies to create a focal point for indigenous youth activities. Governments and indigenous organizations were also urged to include a youth in their delegations.

Participants also addressed special needs that activities of the Second Decade should focus on in their particular regions. Emphasizing the importance of recognizing African indigenous peoples and including them in plans for development, a representative of the Indigenous Information Network/African Indigenous Women Organization East and Central Africa encouraged the Forum to increase awareness concerning indigenous African peoples, promote data collection on their habitats and situations, and collaborate with the Commission on Human Rights to set up a committee of indigenous peoples human rights advocates.

Drawing attention to indigenous tsunami victims in South Asia, a representative of the Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN) recommended that rehabilitation efforts in that region focus not only on infrastructure, but on security for indigenous lands and rights. Consideration for indigenous social and cultural environments must receive equal emphasis, and coastal communities must be relocated in adjacent areas. Underscoring that point, other speakers urged the United Nations to make every effort to understand the rights of indigenous peoples in disasters and tragedies worldwide, and to consider them when drawing up policies, reports and recommendations for relief.

Other participants suggested that more be done to disseminate the results of the Second Decade to indigenous peoples themselves. They also pointed out that the Millennium Goals should be incorporated into the programme for the Second Decade, since it would end at the same time as the deadline for some Goals, in 2015. They also underlined the importance of disaggregated data in monitoring progress towards Decade objectives, and emphasized the importance of continuing multicultural and multilingual health, education and literacy programmes.

In addition, speakers stressed the need to: ensure that indigenous rights were addressed in the United Nations Forum on Forests; integrate indigenous women into all decision-making and plans for the Second Decade; and monitor development activities to ensure that indigenous peoples were fully involved. They also urged States to contribute to the voluntary fund for the Second Decade, develop national legislation to protect indigenous human rights, and create indigenous peoples commissions to monitor their rights in conflict situations.

Bringing together some 1,500 indigenous leaders, activists and representatives, this year's Forum is focusing on indigenous peoples and the Millennium Development Goals of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger and achieving universal primary education. For additional information on the Forum, see Press Release HR/4836 of 13 May.

Also speaking today were the representative of Denmark, Chile and Guatemala. Indonesia addressed the Forum, as well, as did the Chairman of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations.

Statements were made by representatives of Asia Caucus, Arctic Caucus, Association of Indigenous Peoples of North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation, Bangladeshi Adivasi Forum, Earth People, South Asia Indigenous Women Forum, International Native Traditional Interchange, Comité Intertribal de Brasil/Land Is Life, Centre de Documentation de Recherche et d'Information des Peuples Autochtone, Coordination Autochtone Francophone/Consejo Innu/IPACCU, Indian Treaty Council, Assembly of First Nations, and Sami Parliamentarian Council and Finnish Sami Parliament.

Also speaking today were the representatives of International Alliance of Indigenous Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forest, Aldet Centre-Saint Lucia, Adat Alifuru, Meijis of Crimean Tatars, Akha Heritage Foundation, International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs, Comisión Jurídica para el

Autodesarolle de los Pueblos Originarios Andinos, American Indian Law Alliance, Ethnic Minority and Indigenous Rights Organization of Africa, World Adivasi Council, Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas Region Sud America, Tebtebba Foundation, Indigenous Peoples Caucus of the Caribbean, Partnership for Indigenous Peoples Environment, Asociación de Comunidades Indígenas, Indigenous Peoples Survival Foundation, and John Jay College.

The Forum will meet again at 3 p.m. on Thursday, 26 May, to discuss the draft agenda for its fifth session.

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