



Statement by
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President, Partnership for Indigenous Peoples Environment (PIPE) at the Second Session of the
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I would like to use this opportunity to focus on how to ensure that economic and social development reach indigenous peoples and to underscore what the United Nations System can do to ensure that indigenous peoples are not short-changed for as long as another century.

The Partnership for Indigenous Peoples Environment would like this Permanent Forum to recommend that access be created for indigenous peoples to be equal partners in international trade. At the center of globalization is trade. International trade has been boosted by high-tech revolution. Since trade, particularly international trade benefits social and economic development, indigenous peoples must participate to reap the benefits of trade.

Mr. Chairman, the political powers and economic forces that held sway during the past century totally rewrote the history of indigenous peoples, reducing them from great nations and regional powers, to slave posts, colonies and protective administrative territories. The 20th Century was a hundred years of disempowerment for us, the indigenous peoples of the world. We have come to this forum hoping that you can restore human dignity to indigenous peoples so that we can be equal partners in trade for the benefits of our economic and social development. The United Nations has provided an initiative in this direction through the provision of the right to self-determination in its Charter, but the job is not done yet.

I know, Mr. Chairman, that there is always the temptation to exclude indigenous peoples. Such selfish tendency is common in frontier regions where there are a lot of natural wealth and resources in indigenous ancestral homelands. Mr. Chairman, we need a new heart and a new spirit to create access for indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples are not against trade that is respectful of their rights.

The most important right that can pave the way to economic and social development is the Right to Self-determination. Self-determination is very central and strategic. Self-determination will liberate knowledge, beliefs, the arts, morals, laws and customs, and any other capabilities acquired by members of the human family. In fact, self-determination, if allowed to grow has a modifying force. When people can enjoy the freedom to freely choose, they can also choose how they control and manage their own affairs. Indigenous peoples will not run away from international trade knowing that it is an agent for economic and social development.

Self-determination or autonomy by whatever name called, is the backbone of human dignity. But human dignity rests on economic and social development. Indigenous peoples will lack human dignity if they are poverty stricken and dependent on charity

packages where they have been excluded from trade in which their own wealth and resources are being exchanged. Let me clarify, while we welcome partnership from multi-lateral organizations, like the World Bank and the IMF, it is essential for Indigenous people to be equal partners.

Agenda 21 based on the outcome of the Rio Conference underscores the right to development, and there were extended discussions on the right to economic and social development at the world conference on human Rights in Vienna, Austria in June 1993. These rights in the final analysis are dependent on the right to self-determination.

This Forum should recommend that nation states as member states of the United Nations implement the right to self-determination because of its direct link with the right to economic and social development.

Self-determination sometimes scares nation states existing as a result of colonial past. But this is not necessarily about the break-up of nation states as autonomy or self-determination can be exercised through the constitutional provisions within a federal framework. Canada began such constitutional discussion since 1982, or thereabout. The job is not done yet, but it was an act of acknowledgement of what needed to be done, though the process has been slow. But such constitutional building blocks promote peaceful co-existence in a tense political environment. So that was a good first step by Canada.

Indigenous peoples are for trade with a human face. They want to be equal partners at the trade table. So be it.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman for this opportunity.

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