

UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Eleventh Session

15 May 2012

Item 4 Human Rights, Implementation of the UN Declaration on
the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Statement by OHCHR, delivered by Antti Korkeakivi, Chief,
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The rights of indigenous peoples are a priority for the OHCHR, and in pursuing this priority the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is our key reference and framework for action. The High Commissioner herself repeatedly invokes the standards of the Declaration in her dialogue with authorities and indigenous peoples, as you will have seen during her country visits to Australia, Guatemala and other countries.

The role of the Declaration is central in all our work touching on indigenous peoples, ranging from supporting the important work of the mandates of the Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to the fellowship programme and other capacity building work and to providing technical advice and enhancing participation of indigenous peoples in decision-making at both international and national levels.

Our written submission to this session gives details of our current work, but let me highlight a few key initiatives, which in many cases reflect recommendations of the Permanent Forum and are always pursued in close partnership with indigenous peoples.

While the role of the Declaration is repeatedly highlighted in the work of the mandates devoted to indigenous peoples' issues, we must also make sure that this message travels outside the meeting rooms of the Permanent Forum or the Expert Mechanism and the potential of the Declaration is fully exploited also by

other key actors, including those working on human rights. These include, among other actors, national human rights institutions. With this in mind, we have in the past years stimulated strong engagement of NHRIs on indigenous issues and are now completing a guide to help them advance the implementation of the Declaration at the national level.

We have also provided a series of briefings to human rights treaty bodies to make sure that the Declaration is fully taken into account in their work and reflected in jurisprudence. Treaty body engagement, and visibility of indigenous peoples' rights in the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review, is further facilitated by the recent expansion of the mandate of the Voluntary Fund on Indigenous Peoples, which can now support indigenous participation also in these mechanisms.

Much of our work on indigenous peoples takes place at the regional and country level, where we aim to make sure that the Declaration becomes a truly living instrument. This year we have, for example, issued new guidance on sub-regional challenges such as securing human rights of indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation in the Amazon basin and our field presences have taken a range of other initiatives to advance the implementation of the Declaration. For example, the Regional Office for Central America has elaborated an assessment on the situation of indigenous peoples rights in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, leading to a plan of action to enhance the rights of indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples actively participated in the elaboration process through the Regional Consultative Mechanism of Indigenous Peoples established by the Regional Office in 2010.

OHCHR does not work in isolation. In addition to working closely with indigenous peoples representatives, we need to ensure that various UN entities join forces as we implement article 42 of the Declaration, in order to ensure coherence and maximum combined impact of our work. We are therefore pleased to report on the rapid progress achieved under the UN Indigenous Peoples Partnership (UNIPP), an inter-agency initiative that OHCHR is currently co-chairing. Through UNIPP, agencies and indigenous experts select and support new joint initiatives to advance the

rights contained in the Declaration and in the ILO Convention 169, mostly at the country level. The first country programmes – in Bolivia, Nicaragua, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo and Nepal – as well as a regional programme in South East Asia were recently selected for support under UNIPP and we look forward to seeing their contribution to the implementation of the Declaration.

We would like to thank the donors that have supported such initiatives so far and encourage further support for these and other initiatives I have mentioned.

I have highlighted only a few of our ongoing activities and there are also a range of new initiatives in the pipeline, including a seminar on treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements OHCHR will organize in July in line with a recommendation of the Permanent Forum and others. We urge all of you -- both indigenous and state representative -- to take part in these activities and to work in partnership with us, with a view to ensuring that the principles of the Declaration travel from paper to practice.

Thank you.