



STATEMENT OF TEBTEBBA FOUNDATION
ON EDUCATION AND CULTURE

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

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On the thematic areas of culture and education, Tebtebba Foundation wishes to put forward some recommendations in support of language diversity, its adoption as a criterion for monitoring the conservation of cultural and biological diversity in the multi-lateral environmental agreements; and for the Permanent Forum to advocate to halt the loss of indigenous languages. Concretely, we propose:

1. That the Permanent Forum raise greater awareness and understanding about the importance about the use of Mother Tongue in indigenous learning and education, by making available through its website and through other means the research presented by Professor Tove Skutnabb-Kanga to this meeting.
2. That the Permanent Forum advocate for increased efforts to reverse the loss of language diversity by relevant bodies of the UN system, governments, academic institutions, together with indigenous peoples. To call on UNESCO to convene a workshop to consider strategies and mechanisms to address this problem, in cooperation with the Permanent Forum.
3. The UN Permanent Forum should note and support the decisions at COP7 of the Convention on Biological Diversity to develop cultural and social criteria and indicators, eg. the use and maintenance of indigenous languages, for monitoring the implementation of CBD Strategic Plan and Multi-Year Programme of Work and various work programmes. And to request the CBD Executive Secretary to discuss this issue in the multiconventions meetings, so that the proposed indicators can be considered in the implementation of other related instruments.
4. That the UN Permanent Forum, together with DESA should lead a process to identify criteria and indicators (including cultural and social indicators) relevant to indigenous peoples for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, Agenda 21 and WSSD outcomes, and the Plan of Implementation under the UN Forum on Forests. The adoption of common criteria and indicators in collaboration with indigenous peoples, would strengthen holistic implementation of these global programmes.

On Free, Prior and Informed Consent, Tebtebba Foundation welcomes the work done by UNDP to open a discussion on this issue by presenting the perspectives and practices of some UN agencies in document E/C.19/2004/11.

As noted in the paper, "there is no internationally agreed definition of the principle or mechanism for implementation". This echoes the statement made by the UN Secretary General in his mid-term Report on the UN Decade for Indigenous Peoples that "*No universal standards on indigenous peoples guide the United Nations as a whole, and in practice, United Nations organisations are either not adopting any particular guidelines or else are developing guidelines on the basis of different procedures.*"ⁱ

The UNDP paper confirms that the same is true about current discussions on the right of indigenous peoples to free, prior and informed consent. The absence of universally agreed standards on the rights of indigenous peoples is a major obstacle in fully empowering indigenous peoples to play their role in sustainable development.

Therefore, Tebtebba Foundation welcomes the added efforts by the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights and by the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (UNWGIP) to underpin this work on Free, Prior and Informed Consent, by the elaboration of a legal commentary on this right as it relates to developments affecting their lands and natural resources at its 22nd session this July 2004, as the basis for future standard-setting activity.

All future work on FPIC must be undertaken with the full participation of indigenous peoples, who are best able to articulate the problems, as well as the best practices encountered in its implementation.

The Workshop on Indigenous Peoples, private sector natural resource, energy and mining companies and human rights held in 2001 under the auspices of the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, laid the basis for dialogue between indigenous peoples and the corporate sector on this theme, and Tebtebba Foundation recommends that a follow-up workshop be convened, in cooperation with the Permanent Forum, and the Inter-Agency Support Group.

Mr Chairman,

The principle of free, prior and informed consent, has a long history in international relations, including the practice of concluding treaties between the European settlers and governments with the Indigenous Peoples of this continent.

Indigenous peoples have always upheld the need for equal, inter-cultural, people-to-people relations to be based on mutual respect for rights, cultures and institutions, grounded on free, prior and informed consent of the contracting parties.

The diversity of peoples, cultures, and interests – all brought into multiple interactions under contemporary globalisation, challenges all of us to uphold the right of free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples, as the underlying principle to be practised in inter-cultural and inter-political relations.

Thank you Mr. Chairman

ⁱ The Report of the Secretary General on the progress made in implementing the Programme of Activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples (A/54/487)