

**Statement  
By  
H.E. Lauro L. Baja, Jr.  
Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations  
at the 5th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous  
Issues  
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Madame Chairperson,

Allow me to extend my warm congratulations to you and your bureau for the excellent guidance you are providing the Permanent Forum in its work.

I also express appreciation to the Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples of the Commission on Human Rights for his statement this morning on the situation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people.

Madame Chairperson,

The Philippines is deeply committed to the promotion and protection of human rights for all. We renew this commitment as a member of the historic first Human Rights Council.

If I may refer to one of the commitments undertaken by the Philippines regarding its candidature for that esteemed body: (and I quote)

"The Philippines will continue to play an active role in upholding the rights and welfare of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. The Philippines will also continue to be a voice for vulnerable groups and will support human rights-based approaches that address their concerns in a comprehensive, positive and practical way." (end of quote)

The Philippines is a very diverse country, with 110 ethno-linguistic groups, comprised of 12 million individuals. They constitute 15 percent of our national population.

In recognition of this important sector of our society, the Philippines has been implementing for the past eight years, the Indigenous People's Rights Act.

This landmark social legislation reflects the principles embodied in the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Among others, it emphasizes the rights of Indigenous Peoples to their ancestral domains; to preserve their cultures, traditions and institutions; to cultural integrity; to freedom from discrimination; to equal rights and opportunities; and to participate in development decisions.

Madame Chairperson,

In his reports, the Special Rapporteur reported that, around the world, there remains what he calls an "implementation gap" between laws on indigenous peoples rights and the application of these laws.

To meet this challenge, the Philippines has undertaken to enhance the implementation of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act. The Philippines' membership in the Human Rights Council will certainly present a better opportunity to utilize networks to strengthen partnerships in the area of human rights and development for indigenous peoples.

In the Philippines, not one but two independent bodies are mandated to formulate and implement policies and programs for the well-being and protection of indigenous peoples. The primary agency is the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples - or NCIP - whose membership is comprised of members of indigenous communities. Our national Commission on Human Rights also addresses matters on the protection and promotion of indigenous peoples' rights.

These two commissions are working together on a pioneering project to design a survey that measures the human rights situation of Indigenous Peoples. The results will address one of the main obstacles to fully addressing the needs of indigenous communities, that is, the lack of disaggregated data to identify who they are, where they are, what they need and how to meet those needs. We look forward to sharing the results and experience to other countries.

Madame Chair,

The Special Rapporteur, in his report to the General Assembly last October 2005, identified two culprits that prevent indigenous peoples from fully enjoying their fundamental freedoms: poverty and armed conflict.

The Philippines' Medium-Term Development Plan focuses on the alleviation of poverty, promotion of livelihood and strengthening education across the nation, in line with the Millennium Development Goals. It gives particular notice to the concerns of indigenous peoples.

The Philippines agrees with the Special Rapporteur that armed conflict creates a climate inimical to the protection and fulfillment of human rights. This is why the Philippine government is pursuing conflict prevention and conflict resolution efforts in areas where many indigenous communities live.

Earlier this month, in the latest round of talks, negotiators for both the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, jointly announced substantial gains on the matters of ancestral domain and natural resources management.

The National Commission has secured tenure for 15 percent of its target of ancestral domain, lands and waters.

Madame Chair,

The Philippines welcomes the Programme of Action for the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

The Philippines also supports stepping up of work towards consensus on the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Persons. We hope that the international community will adopt this important document as early as possible, within the Second Decade. In the interim, however, the Philippines is proud to have a national law that recognizes, protects, promotes, and operationalizes the rights of indigenous peoples.

I thank you, Madame Chair.