

10th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
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Agenda Item 8:

Future Work of the Permanent Forum:

- (i) Discussion on the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples; and
- (ii) Discussion on Rio +20

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Preliminary Remarks by:

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Madame Chairperson, Indigenous, state & non-governmental delegations, UN agencies, ladies & gentlemen

Thank you for this opportunity to make some preliminary remarks on the agenda item of Future Work of the Forum. I would like to confine my intervention to two key future events: the *World Conference on Indigenous Peoples* and the World Summit known as *Rio +20*.

World Conference on Indigenous Peoples

In accordance with its resolution A/Res/65/198 on Indigenous Issues, at its sixty sixth session, the General Assembly decided to organize a high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly, to be known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, to be held in 2014, in order to share perspectives and best practices on the realization of the rights of indigenous peoples, including to pursue the objectives of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Presidency of the General Assembly was invited to conduct open-ended consultations with Member States and with representatives of indigenous peoples within the framework of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, as well as with the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, in order to determine the modalities for the meeting, including the participation of indigenous peoples in the Conference.

We may perhaps draw some parallels with the world conferences on the rights of Women, the fourth and so far last, having been held in Beijing in 1995. However, while there have been four world conferences on the subject of women, none so far have been held on the subject of indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples constitute a segment of humanity who have not only been the subject of genocide and discrimination, but have in most cases been excluded from the modern process of state-building and development. National constitutions have been adopted, state structures have been designed, laws on the ownership and use of land and natural resources have been framed. In most cases, these have happened without the role of indigenous peoples. Therefore, except for a few cases in the last decade or so, indigenous peoples were not involved in deciding the "rules of the game". A World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, will therefore provide a unique opportunity to provide an insightful understanding of the nature of the discrimination faced by indigenous peoples, historically and currently. Such an understanding will be crucial towards the adoption of measures to eradicate such discrimination and to bring forth an equitable partnership between indigenous peoples and states, as set out in the goals of the First, and the Second and ongoing, Decade for Indigenous Peoples. The challenge here will be to include indigenous peoples as full partners in this process. In the case of Women's Rights, the *UN Commission on the Status of Women* has played a key role in preparatory and follow-up processes. A similar role for the Permanent Forum, EMRIP and the Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples – as the key UN institutions dealing with indigenous peoples' rights - is only logical, equitable and pragmatic. We therefore hope that this discussion today will bring forth concrete suggestions on the modalities of holding such a conference, including on the role of the Forum and other indigenous-specific UN processes in it.

Rio+20

The Permanent Forum welcomes the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio + 20) as the prime opportunity for the world community to reaffirm the role of all key segments of humanity, including indigenous peoples, and to strengthen their roles in achieving sustainable development, particularly in a world threatened by Climate Change.

In the first World Conference on Environment and Sustainable Development at Rio, in 1992, indigenous peoples were recognized as one of the "major groups", and a specific chapter was devoted to their role in Agenda 21, the major document resulting from the Rio summit. Then in the following world summit at the UN General Assembly Special Session at UN headquarters in 1997 (Rio+5), representatives of indigenous peoples addressed a full and formal session of the General Assembly, for the very first time. Then in the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) at Johannesburg in 2002, the contributions of indigenous peoples to sustainable development were acknowledged. While the formal acknowledgment of their role in sustainable development was modest in relation to the scale of their historical and ongoing contributions towards environmental protection and sustainable development, indigenous peoples themselves articulated their worldview on environmental conservation and sustainable development through such landmark instruments as the Kari-Oca Declaration in 1992 and the Kimberley Declaration in 2002. At Kari Oca, indigenous peoples proudly proclaimed: "We, the Indigenous Peoples, walk to the future in the footprints of our ancestors".

Among the major pillars of sustainable development are diverse economies, empowered communities and resilient ecosystems at the local level. In this, indigenous peoples' customary resource management systems and local livelihoods are tested examples of sustainable use of natural resources, embodying principles on what we nowadays call "green economies". Indigenous peoples, as rights-holders and ecosystem managers, have made gigantic contributions towards sound environmental governance at all levels - at local, sub-national, national, regional and global levels. The challenge lies in mainstreaming these knowledge systems, innovations and practices, which Agenda 21 calls "traditional scientific knowledge", for all of humanity, with the consent of indigenous peoples, and in a spirit of partnership. As in the case of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, the modalities for Rio+20, its preparatory phases, and its follow-up mechanisms and processes, must respect the rights of indigenous peoples, including those acknowledged in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Thank you.