

Check against delivery

Fourteenth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

New York, 20 April - 1 May 2015

Provisional Agenda Item 7: Human rights

Statement by Mr. Legborsi Saro Pyagbara

on behalf of the

Board of Trustees of the

United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples

Madam Chair, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to take the floor to address the Fourteenth Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples (UNVFIP). Let me first of all congratulate you for your appointment as Chairperson of this session. At the outset, I would also like to welcome the thirty-two beneficiaries of the Fund who are present with us, making an important contribution to the success of this session.

This year marks the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Fund, which was established by the General Assembly in 1985 to assist representatives of indigenous communities and organizations to participate in the deliberations of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations. Thirty years is quite a significant and symbolic number associated with the idea of maturity and dedication. Dedication and political will of all those who back then united to create a Fund enabling Indigenous Peoples, who had been historically excluded from decision making processes, to finally voice their concerns at the international level and take part in discussions and decisions affecting them. And here, I would also like to pay a special tribute to all the members of the Board, appointed since its creation, who have committed to the challenging task of selecting beneficiaries of the Fund, who then engaged

Check against delivery

in major international processes. On this occasion, I want to honour the memory of Mr. Don Augusto Willemsen-Diaz, who was one of those who contributed in a decisive way to the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples within the U.N. systems and also played a role in the founding of the UNVFIP. He served on this board from its beginning for almost three-terms. His passing away in December 2014 was a sad loss to us but we are consoled by the fact that our ancestors have welcomed him into the abode of the great ones. . On this note, I would also like to seize this opportunity to welcome the newly appointed members of our Board of Trustees, namely Ms. Myrna Cunningham (Nicaragua), Ms. Anne Nuorgam (Finland), Mr. Binota Dhamai (Bangladesh) and Ms. Claire Charters (New Zealand), who will carry their mandates until 2017.

An anniversary also enables us to look back and celebrate what has been accomplished. The active participation of Indigenous Peoples in UN deliberations over the past years has proven to be extremely beneficial as it opened spaces for dialogue with Member States and UN agencies, thus creating an enabling environment conducive to the recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights. Since its creation, the Fund has constantly contributed to that collective effort by supporting the participation of around 2000 indigenous representatives. A significant number of these representatives were involved in the negotiations that led to the landmark adoption by the General Assembly in 2007 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, thus giving it a strong legitimacy. Many more examples of the positive impact of the Fund over the past thirty years could be cited. To celebrate this anniversary, a video collecting testimonies of former grantees and shedding light on successful stories is in the making.

Thirty years after its creation, the mandate and scope of the Fund has significantly broadened. As you know, the Fund now supports the participation of representatives of Indigenous Peoples not only in the sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples but also in sessions of other human rights mechanisms that are of vital importance to advance the rights of Indigenous Peoples, namely human rights treaty bodies, the Human Rights Council and the Universal Periodic Review process.. We are actually increasingly seeing the results of the effective

Check against delivery

engagement of Indigenous Peoples' representatives in the work of human rights bodies, with specific recommendations being made advocating for the promotion, respect and fulfilment of Indigenous Peoples' rights.

Over the years, not only did the Fund provided financial assistance to support the participation of Indigenous Peoples' representatives in UN processes but it also contributed to strengthen their capacity, thereby ensuring a more effective use of these international human rights mechanisms. In cooperation with NGO partners - in particular DoCip - the Fund has dedicated resources to offer human rights training to selected Indigenous Peoples' representatives - including during the Permanent Forum - thus helping them prepare constructive interventions, maximise their participation, tailor their advocacy to each UN event and make the necessary follow-up back home.

Chair, Excellency (ies), Ladies and Gentlemen, let me now give you an update on the activities of the Board in 2014-2015.

Last year was of particular significance with the first ever high-level plenary meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (WCIP). Once again, the Fund played a crucial role in supporting the participation of 105 Indigenous Peoples' representatives in the World Conference and its preparatory process. In addition, the Board of Trustees of the Fund supported in 2014 the participation of sixty (60) representatives of Indigenous Peoples' organisations and communities in the 13th session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the 7th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as sessions of the Human Rights Council, the UPR working group and human rights treaty bodies.

For 2015, the Board of Trustees has so far selected eighty (80) indigenous representatives to attend the 14th session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the 8th session of Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as sessions of the Human Rights Council, the UPR working group, the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Committee Against Torture and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Of particular

Check against delivery

importance this year is the follow-up to the Outcome Document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, including the review of the mandate of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In that context, the Board has decided to increase the number of grants usually allocated for EMRIP to support robust participation of Indigenous Peoples in the discussion on the mandate review that will take place during the 8th session of EMRIP in July this year. The Board further recommended that a budget be set aside to allow for the attendance of additional 36 Indigenous Peoples' representatives in sessions of the human rights mechanisms that will take place between July 2015 and March 2016.

I would like to emphasise that the Board of Trustees always tries to ensure a fair geographical representation and gender balance when selecting beneficiaries of the Fund. Due consideration is also given to groups that are underrepresented, including the youth and indigenous persons with disabilities.

As you know, the work of the Fund is supported by means of voluntary contributions from Governments, non-governmental organizations and other private or public entities. The Fund would not be in a position to carry out its duties without sustainable financial support. In this regard and on behalf of the Board of Trustees, I would like to express our deepest gratitude and appreciation to the governments of Argentina, Australia, Chile, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, the Holy See, Mexico, Mongolia, New Zealand, Norway, Peru and Turkey for their generous contributions to the Voluntary Fund in 2014-2015.

The members of the Board very much welcome the increase in the level of contributions received in 2014 compared to previous years. At the same time, we are working to ensure sustained efforts beyond the World Conference to maintain similar levels of funding, as the uncertainty about future contributions continues to impact the delivery of our mandate. The numerous expansions of the mandate of the Fund created new opportunities for Indigenous Peoples to voice their concerns at the international level, which is extremely positive; but it also means increasing demands for support. After assessing the present financial needs of the Fund, the Board of Trustees recommends a target of \$ 1.4 million for the biennium 2014-2015.

Check against delivery

We all very well know that enabling the participation of Indigenous Peoples in meetings that directly affect their lives is essential to ensuring that decisions made carry legitimacy and yield positive results. Without the financial support of the Fund, many Indigenous Peoples would face severe challenges to actively contribute to these important international human rights processes. New opportunities to input into decisive processes are already emerging in the aftermaths of the World Conference on Indigenous People and the Fund must stand ready to support the participation of Indigenous Peoples' representatives in that new global context.

In the spirit of this celebration, I would like to conclude by saying that we must strive to pursue our collective effort towards the full participation of those most directly affected and thus seek to achieve the effective realisation of Indigenous Peoples' rights, as enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. With particular reference to paragraph 38 of the Outcome Document of the World Conference, I would like to appeal to all Governments to consider supporting the vital work of the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples.

I thank you.