

**Statement of Ms Rachel Mayanja, Assistant Secretary General, Department of Economic and Social Affairs to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at its Eighth Session**

18 May 2009

Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,  
Distinguished Elders,  
Distinguished representatives of Member States, Indigenous Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations,  
Colleagues from the UN system and other inter-governmental organizations,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome the emphasis on implementation that will be given by the Eighth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and will provide the opportunity to review key themes of previous sessions –namely economic and social development, indigenous women, and the Second International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People, to measure progress made and assess the challenges ahead.

I wish to congratulate the Permanent Forum for its attention on implementation, including the innovative methodology of in-depth dialogue with UN agencies. The significant inputs received for this session of the Permanent Forum include information from 12 Governments, a record number by comparison to previous years, as well as 24 documents from UN system and other intergovernmental organizations and 12 indigenous peoples’ organizations, in addition to papers submitted by the Permanent Forum experts. Given this voluminous documentation, I believe it is useful to highlight a number of conclusions and recommendations that are emerging from the reports received.

In the area of economic and social development, UN agencies and other inter-governmental bodies have responded well to the Permanent Forum’s recommendations on economic and social development, especially when these are addressed specifically. The Forum should explore a methodology to encourage UN Country Teams to report and participate in the follow-up process, as is currently the case with the Ecuador UN Country Team.

The Forum's recommendations regarding the Millennium Development Goals, while influencing the work of agencies at headquarters level, are not yet being fully implemented at national level. This will require a concerted effort from UN country teams.

In terms of Governments, the follow-up process is more difficult because of a lack of information from many States. Those States that have provided information are certainly to be commended and should continue doing so.

Indigenous peoples' organizations should also be encouraged to participate more actively in the reporting and follow-up process at local, national and international level, including at the sessions of the Permanent Forum.

Many of the Forum's recommendations are labeled as "ongoing" in the recommendations database prepared by the secretariat of the Forum. It should be understood that many of the Forum's recommendations, due to their broad, comprehensive nature, will require a long term approach to their implementation.

It is highly recommended that good practices in the implementation of recommendations on economic and social development should be compiled and disseminated.

Another insight in the area of development is given by desk reviews of one regional and nine national Human Development Reports conducted this year by the secretariat of the Permanent Forum to ascertain progress on indigenous issues.

The following are some general conclusions:

- Except for one country, the Reports that were reviewed have very little information on the state of human development of indigenous peoples and none provided disaggregated data in the context of the MDGs.

- In the case of the African countries and one Asian, indigenous peoples were not explicitly mentioned in the Reports, except as part of the collective poor and marginalized groups.
- In the context of the MDGs, extreme poverty and high incidences of infant and maternal mortality seem to be the most pressing problems in indigenous communities. These are due to a number of factors, with inadequate access to land, health services, safe drinking water, and natural resources being the most common cause of poverty and mortality among indigenous peoples.
- Land rights issues and disputes over ownership of land are a major concern for many indigenous peoples in the countries and regions reviewed. References to indigenous peoples were made when the Reports address land issues.
- Marginalization, discrimination, and exclusion of indigenous peoples, are the most persistent social issues in all the countries reviewed.
- None of the HDRs that were reviewed clearly indicate whether indigenous peoples participated, or were solicited to participate, in the creation of the reports.

The recommendations emerging from the desk reviews of HDRs include the following:

- HDRs should highlight and include the plight of indigenous peoples, who are among the most marginalized groups in society and often the victims of development.
- In order to properly identify the development challenges that indigenous peoples face, as well as the role they can play in the achievement of the MDGs, their inclusion and participation in the creation of HDRs is imperative.
- Future country reports should include a comprehensive section on the poorest performing provinces or sub-regions and present disaggregated data in order to

identify the specific populations that are clear outliers of progress in human development.

Madame Chairperson,

Turning now to the Forum's recommendations on indigenous women, a number of important programs and activities have been undertaken to meet some of the recommendations, while implementation of the remaining 46 per cent of relevant recommendations has not been reported or initiated.

Since the majority of information received by the Permanent Forum addresses situations in Central and South America and the Caribbean, the Permanent Forum should encourage reporting regarding other regions in order to better assess the state of implementation in those areas. Indigenous women's organizations should also be invited to engage in their own monitoring of the implementation of Forum's recommendations to the UN system and others at the local and country levels, as well as the regional level and inform the Forum if they deem appropriate.

Turning now to the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, it should be pointed out that the Secretariat has not received a critical enough mass of responses regarding the Decade in order to be able to ascertain all progress made in the implementation of the goal, objectives and Programme of Action of the Decade. We therefore welcome the adoption of General Assembly resolution A/Res/63/61 (second operative paragraph) in December 2008 requesting a mid-Decade review to be submitted by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly in 2010. This review will be conducted with the broad participation of states, indigenous organizations and other non-governmental organizations as well as of the United Nations system and other inter-governmental organizations.

While the mid-Decade review called for by the General Assembly in 2010 will give the opportunity to all concerned to renew their commitment to the Decade, take relevant actions and provide comprehensive inputs on the implementation of the Decade, it should be pointed out that at least two clear broad outcomes have been catalysed during the first years of the Decade: (a) an increased awareness of indigenous issues and increased involvement of Member States, United Nations and other inter-governmental organizations in indigenous issues, including at the field level, and (b) the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples..

At this important juncture of the Decade's vision and of the efforts towards the Millennium Development Goals, it is recommended that States, indigenous peoples and the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and other actors of civil society undertake initiatives inspired by the goal, objectives and Programme of Action of the Decade, including financial support to the Trust Fund on Indigenous Issues. It is also recommended that reporting of all concerned on progress in the implementation of the Decade be enhanced, including on the part of indigenous peoples and their organizations.

Before closing, I would like to extend the appreciation of my Department to all States and UN system and other intergovernmental organizations for their sincere cooperation on indigenous issues. I am extending congratulations to the Government of Norway for hosting the pre-sessional meeting of the Permanent Forum this year, in Karasjok, Saamiland, in March this year, and the Governments of Denmark, Algeria, Suriname, Germany, Finland, Japan, Chile, Mexico and Canada for their contributions to the Trust Fund on Indigenous Issues in 2008. In addition, UNESCO has our thanks as well for hosting the annual meeting of the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues last year.

Madame Chairperson,

It is through continuous commitment and international cooperation that we will achieve the goal of the Second Decade, namely progress on indigenous issues in the areas of human rights, economic and social development, environment, education, health and culture. Let us work towards this goal in partnership with the indigenous peoples of the world.