

A Statement by Musa Usman Ndamba, delegate of the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association of Cameroon (MBOSCUDA) during the 3rd Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues at the United Nations Headquarters, New York, 10th – 21st May, 2004

Chairman of the 3rd Session of the Permanent Forum, Delegates of Indigenous Organization, Distinguished personalities, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Accept greetings from the Mbororo pastoralist people of Cameroon. We are grateful to the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations for funding our participation at this Forum, without which it would have been impossible to represent the voice of the indigenous peoples of Cameroon here today. In this statement I will briefly give you the context within which we are living and operating and then go on to address the theme of this year – indigenous women.

The Mbororo pastoralists of Cameroon number about two million five hundred people. The Mbororo are highly marginalized peoples, without any form of representation in political decision-making structures. This is also true for the Pygmy and to some extent the Kirdi peoples of Cameroon. As pastoralists whose livelihood largely depends on cattle herding, land security is a major concern. But unfortunately the land tenure laws in Cameroon greatly favor the dominant farming population, which has left the Mbororo at the mercy of corrupt officials who are using their privileged positions to exploit the Mbororo. Mbororo lands are constantly being seized by powerful ranchers who use their wealth and influence to victimize them. In addition to land rights and political marginalization, the indigenous peoples of Cameroon face similar problems to those of other indigenous peoples around the world such as poverty, racism, violation of intellectual property rights, persecution and issues of sustainable development.

We are grateful to the Permanent Forum for choosing this year's theme—the Indigenous woman. MBOSCUDA takes women's welfare very seriously. The constitutive meeting of MBOSCUDA was chaired by Hawe Bouba, a woman who continues not only to provide good overall leadership within MBOSCUDA but also plays a leading role in women issues within Cameroon and the Central African region. She was accredited as an AIWO-MBOSCUDA delegate but unfortunately was unjustifiably refused entry visa by the USA consular services in Yaounde. Our Secretary General Fadimatou Dahirou is also a woman who ably represents our organization in the UNWGIP. MBOSCUDA participated in the first ever international conference on African indigenous women in Agadir, Morocco in 1998. MBOSCUDA now hosts the Central African office of the African Indigenous Women Organization (AIWO) supported by NCIV. AIWO undertakes community development and advocacy work with indigenous women across Cameroon. They have organized participatory appraisals and training with Kirdi women in the remote Rumsiki Mountains of North Cameroon; with Pygmy women in the forests regions of South and East Provinces and with Mbororo women in Koupe Maninguba of the South-West Province just to mention a few. They have also carried out training for indigenous women in Chad.

Recommendation:

As we all know, indigenous women are the custodians of our cultural heritage and are in charge of passing this culture and tradition from generation to generation. Unfortunately, indigenous women all over the world have very limited access to formal education. Therefore educating the woman is educating the whole world. We recommend to the UN to institute an international decade for the indigenous woman. During this period the UN could set up a UN Fund for the education of Indigenous girl-child. This Fund shall be used to support the education of indigenous girls from elementary to university and provide skills training for indigenous women. We make this recommendation because we believe that education is the only and surest way for people to move out of marginalization and to claim and enjoy their social, cultural, economic and human rights.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, considering that most African Governments do not yet recognize the importance of this Forum, makes it difficult to implement recommendations and decisions taken here. We would like to suggest that this forum sends a strong delegation to visit African nations and explain and sensitize African governments on indigenous issues. Permit me to use this opportunity to first of all thank all those organization and individuals who have been supporting us in our struggle for our right and dignity.

Thank you for your attention.