



Agenda Item 4c
HEALTH

STATEMENT BY THE ASIAN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' CAUCUS

D. ROY LAIFUNGBAM

Respected Chairperson

Indigenous peoples' organisations held a preparatory meeting from 29-31 March 2003, in Chiang Mai, Thailand, for the second session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The meeting was attended by 44 indigenous representatives from 29 organisations.

The meeting made the following recommendations regarding indigenous peoples' health in Asia, which were endorsed by the Asian Indigenous Peoples' Caucus at this forum.

Recommendations

Affirming the encompassing fundamental perceptions on health held by indigenous peoples and the significance of incorporating indigenous understanding of the human body, the determinants of health and illness and existing indigenous practices for the development and guidelines on health acknowledged by the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in its final report of the first session;

Reiterating the health crisis situations faced by indigenous peoples and their communities throughout Asia and the rest of the world;

Recognising the need to prioritize and focus on specific and practical objectives and outcomes;

Fully supporting the recommendations to this second session of the Forum from the global Indigenous Peoples' health caucus - the Committee on Indigenous Health;

The Permanent Forum should

1. Ensure that its existing recommendations regarding health, made during its first session and that have not been implemented, be pursued for implementation at the earliest. In particular, recommendations regarding:
 - a. The organising of two technical seminars to plan a UN system-wide strategy to address the health needs of indigenous children and women, and to assess existing programmes within the UN system with a view to expand them appropriately to include indigenous peoples and assess safety protocols relating to immunisation and vaccinations, respectively;
 - b. Preparation of a study to determine the extent of indigenous peoples' access to health care and ways and means to make health care culturally appropriate;

- c. And organising a working group on free and prior informed consent and participatory research guidelines within the context of sustainable health development of indigenous peoples should be implemented;
2. Ensure closer and sustained interaction between the Forum and indigenous peoples on health issues by facilitating the Committee on Indigenous Health, an indigenous peoples' caucus on health since 1997, to:
 - a. enhance interaction with traditional healers and practitioners
 - b. gather information on indigenous health systems and practices with an objective to recognise and legitimise such systems and practices
 - c. be actively and closely involved in all stages the proposed study on access to health care and culturally appropriate health care for indigenous peoples;
3. Propose that with regard to indigenous women's and children's health, relevant UN programmes, funds and specialised bodies give priority attention to:
 - a. The gendered aspect of indigenous health knowledge, distinguish and empower indigenous women's health knowledge and contribution to health
 - b. Reproductive health of indigenous women, with focus on HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections
 - c. The identification of specific policies, guidelines and programmes, and their implementation, for indigenous children, youth and women
4. Ensure closer continuing and inter-sessional relationship between indigenous peoples and the members of the Forum by
 - a. Identifying, together with indigenous peoples, the various indigenous peoples, communities and groups within the countries in Asia, with special attention to those who are few in numbers and threatened
 - b. Initiating sustained efforts for the Forum member/s from Asia to visit each country, giving priority to those countries where the indigenous peoples' movements and organisations are weakest and finding resources to organise meetings with them through partnerships with supporting organisations, funds and development cooperation initiatives;
5. Encourage and urge the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) to rapidly establish an engagement policy for indigenous and tribal peoples that is based on equal partnership and which is accountable and inclusive, to be implemented with adequate resources from the regular budget of these specialised agencies. As an important and priority step:
 - a. The report and recommendations of the landmark International Consultation on the Health of Indigenous Peoples, WHO Headquarters, Geneva, November 1999 referred to by the World Health Assembly in its resolution (agenda item 18) WHA 54.16 of 22 May 2001 be immediately made public and submitted to the Forum for its information and urgent consideration.