

Statement by
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27/05/05, Closing Statement,
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CLOSING SPEECH OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Distinguished delegates of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Distinguished observers from Member States, Representatives of Indigenous Organizations, observers from UN bodies and agencies,

We have reached the end of the 4th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and I can say with confidence that we achieved a lot in these past two weeks.

First of all, we managed to bring around 1,200 participants from governments, indigenous organizations and communities, NGOs, the academia and UN bodies, agencies and funds. The spectrum of participants range from indigenous representatives coming from far-flung indigenous territories both from the developing and developed world to international diplomats and civil servants, and high-level officials from the UN system and other multilateral bodies. This broad range of participants is one of the unique features of the Forum which has been sustained since it was established.

Secondly, we had thorough discussions and dialogues between the members of the Permanent Forum and the Inter-agency support group, governments and indigenous peoples. The interactive dialogues provided more opportunities to discuss indigenous perspectives and strategies on development and how these relate to the MDG goals 1 and 2, and further elaborate ways of implementing recommendations which emerged not only from this session but the previous sessions. Indigenous impoverishment and the underlying structural causes of has been the subject of interventions from the floor and many side events. But we did not talk only of the problems and underlying causes. We also dealt with how to address some of these underlying causes such as structural discrimination manifested through existing laws and policies. We stressed that indigenous impoverishment be adequately reflected in the Millenium Development Goals Country Reports, Common Country Assessments and UN Development Assistance Frameworks (CCA/UNDAF) and poverty reduction papers and strategies.

The recommendations we adopted under MDG 1, eradication of poverty and hunger, if implemented will have significant impacts on the lives of indigenous peoples. It will take strong and creative partnerships between indigenous peoples, governments and the UN system to make a significant dent in changing this poverty situation. But it is very important to stress that the basic framework to use in addressing such situation is the human-rights based framework on development. There is no point in talking about poverty alleviation if we do not talk about rights of indigenous peoples to their lands, territories and natural resources.

On the agenda item MDG goal 2, achieving universal primary education, we also came up with several recommendations to ensure that education will not be used to assimilate and integrate indigenous peoples into mainstream society and further

undermine their own identities, cultures and traditional knowledge. Bilingual and intercultural education both for indigenous and non-indigenous peoples are crucial to sustain cultural diversity. It was stressed that this goal should be framed in terms of promoting the right of indigenous children to have education which is appropriate and relevant for them.

We also were able to come up with concrete proposals on how to carry forward the results and recommendations of the International Expert Workshops on Data Disaggregation, methodologies of Free, Prior and Informed Consent, and the cross-cutting themes of indigenous women, children and youth. We strongly recommend that the recommendations of these workshops be used by the UN system, the multilateral development banks and member states.

Thirdly, we had a very substantial session on the human rights agenda. The speech of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, Madame Louise Arbour, the Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Rights and the Chair of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations put in the proper context how the Permanent Forum should deal with human rights issues. The need to ensure the implementation of the Covenants on Human Rights and increasing the use of treaty bodies of the UN by indigenous peoples was underscored. We also recommend that the adoption of the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples be done within the next two years as this is crucial in protecting indigenous peoples' rights.

Fourthly, we got down to discussing how the Second Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples goals, objectives, programs and activities should be shaped and finalized. We thank those who contributed in writing their suggestions and those who intervened and agreed that the Bureau of the Forum will be the advisory group for the Coordinator of the Decade in relation to the management and use of the UN Voluntary Fund for the Second Decade. We are looking forward to the launching of the program for the Second Decade during the 5th Session of the Permanent Forum.

Fifth, we got down to innovating new methods of work such as appointing some of the experts of the Permanent Forum to become Special Rapporteurs on various themes and issues and asking them to present their reports in the next sessions. We also will hold more interactive dialogues in the future with indigenous peoples, governments, and the inter-agency support group.

Dear friends, I would like to conclude by thanking warmly the members of Secretariat who have done a wonderful job in making our sessions run smoothly with the least tensions.

We come out of these session with high hopes that finally all the various actors in this Forum will do their roles and work hard towards ensuring that rights of indigenous peoples are respected and promoted and self-determining development is going to be actualized in their own territories.