

Fourth Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
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**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Statement of the Chairperson of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz

Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations,  
President of the General Assembly,  
President of the Economic and Social Council,  
Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,  
Distinguished Observers from Member States, Indigenous Organizations, the Inter-Governmental system, non-governmental organizations, the academia, and the media,  
Sisters and brothers,

It gives me a great pleasure to address you today at this Fourth Session of the Permanent Forum which has devoted its special theme to the “Millennium Development Goals and Indigenous Peoples”, especially the first two goals: “Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger” and “Achieve universal primary education”. Before anything else, let me pay my respects to the Onondaga nation who are the original inhabitants of this land.

I would like to thank, most warmly, my colleagues of the Permanent Forum for placing their trust in me to chair this session. I thank you on my behalf and my people, the Kankana-ey Igorot of the Philippines, on behalf of my organizations, Tebtebba and the Asian Indigenous Women’s Network, as well as the indigenous representatives from Asia who chose me to be a member of the Forum. I commit to do my best to carry out my duties, with your valuable help, so that the Forum can contribute in improving indigenous peoples’ lives around the world.

The Permanent Forum has a daunting task because of the high expectations created during in the past three years. Undoubtedly, there have been many significant achievements within the Forum within its short existence. However, there is still a long way to go in developing effective and more coordinated responses to the tremendous problems and challenges faced by indigenous peoples, the world over. The Permanent Forum, alone, cannot do this. Neither can the governments do it alone nor can the indigenous peoples do it on their own.

This is the beauty of the Forum. It puts the various actors together in a space where they can talk with each other and produce concrete results in terms of promoting further indigenous rights and development. The increasing dynamic participation of indigenous peoples, member states and the UN and other intergovernmental bodies, as further evidenced by your presence today, is a source of strength and inspiration for us to take such challenges head on.

Worsening impoverishment, marginalization and gross violation of basic human rights, has been and still remains the lot of many indigenous peoples whether they are in the developed or developing world. This reality counters whatever is touted as benefits of globalization. What should be done to change this sad situation? How do we ensure that the MDGs will be achieved but not at our expense? These are just some of the issues we have to tackle in this session.

Within the past three years we have seen what the Forum can do, which no other body in the United Nations can. We also saw what it offered in terms of ideas and concrete actions. Let me mention a few of these initial achievements which is a legacy we should build upon.

**The Forum has considerably increased the visibility and awareness of indigenous issues at the international level.** The presence of the UN Secretary General, the Deputy Secretary General, as well as the Presidents of the General Assembly and ECOSOC, and other high officials of the UN, at its sessions has significantly contributed to this. The Forum's Bureau was received in 2003 by the President of the Security Council. An average of 1200 attend its annual sessions which include around 1000 indigenous representatives, NGOs and academia, 70 member states and 35 inter-governmental organizations. Indigenous representatives who have attended, come from all of the four corners of the world and they bring with them the wisdom and knowledge they and their ancestors accumulated through centuries. The sophisticated quality of participation in terms of substance and innovative forms and ideas, has made the Forum one of the global events which should not be missed.

**The Forum has established itself as a nodal point for catalytic action, coordination, and cross fertilization at the international, regional and national levels.** Its mandate to coordinate actions on indigenous issues is most crucial. The composition of the participants to the Forum and the many fresh ideas and recommendations which emerged from the past three sessions is a challenge in terms of how these can be translated into action, properly coordinated and monitored. The catalytic role of the Forum is exhibited in various ways. One of these is the increasing coordination and complementation between the members of the Inter Agency Support Group. The number of inter-governmental bodies composing this group has increased to 20 and there are still others requesting to be brought in. Obviously, they see an added value in thinking and working together at various levels to be more effective in responding to indigenous issues. Cross-fertilization of ideas and experiences between indigenous peoples, governments, inter-governmental bodies, non-government organizations and the academia has enriched policy debates and action programs. The official visits of the Permanent Forum members to agencies (FAO, IFAD, ILO and WIPO) has resulted into joint projects such as the formulation of frameworks, policies and strategies on development and indigenous peoples.

**The Forum is a platform and catalyst for challenging and emerging issues and innovative methods of work.** Issues such as data collection and disaggregation based on ethnicity; free, prior and informed consent; shaping the

Millennium Development Goals to be indigenous-peoples' sensitive are some of the emerging and challenging issues. The numerous side-events held are where new ideas are shared and tested, good practices are shared and new forms of engagement with governments, and UN bodies are imagined and worked out. Innovative methods of work like the portfolio system for the Forum members has allowed their more in-depth involvement in the various mandated areas of the Forum and sectoral areas. The 10-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the World Summit on Information Society, and the MDG processes were opportunities for the Forum to promote integration of indigenous issues into their agendas. The adoption of multi-year programmes of work within the UN system has influenced the way the Forum is handling its mandates and tasks.

**The Forum is a space for promoting solidarity, connectivity and networking.** The presence of key leaders of major indigenous organizations and movements at the Forum's session allows for further discussion, networking and joint planning on common activities between them. It is a space which indigenous peoples use very wisely to understand better each others situations, strengthen solidarity links and plan and undertake common actions.

I welcome the continuing work on the two major methodological issues identified by the Permanent Forum, namely data collection and disaggregation and free, prior and informed consent. I welcome in particular the results of the International Expert Workshop on Methodologies Regarding Free Prior and Informed Consent and Indigenous Peoples that was held from 17 to 19 January 2005, following the Forum's recommendation and ECOSOC's approval. The conclusions and recommendations identify elements of a common understanding of free, prior and informed consent, as well as a number of recommendations of a general nature, and specific recommendations addressing participation, capacity building and good practices. The idea of coming up with a guidebook on free, prior and informed consent is very much welcomed by indigenous peoples.

Last year, the Forum wisely stressed the importance of focusing on regional issues and of approaching the mobilization of solutions at that level, in order to increasingly bring solutions to indigenous communities. We are pleased that this year the SPFII in cooperation with the Inter-Agency Support Group will facilitate three specific-regional side events focusing on Africa, Asia and Latin America, where the Forum will promote a dialogue among UN-system and other inter-governmental and indigenous peoples organizations. We look forward to the participation of governments within the regions and the regional bureaus or divisions of the UN bodies, agencies and funds.

Since the Forum came into being we already have accumulated numerous recommendations addressed to the UN bodies and agencies, governments and indigenous peoples. For this session, therefore, we have to make recommendations sparingly. It is very tempting to add more recommendations but what is needed at this point are realistic implementation proposals and clear commitments from governments, UN agencies and also from indigenous peoples in terms of what they can do. It is important that this Fourth Session puts more focus on gathering ideas for concrete actions and commitments.

This session should also be used to identify what are the constraints and obstacles in implementing the recommendations and carefully crafting steps that need to be taken to overcome these.

Sisters and brothers, we have come a long way since the idea of a Permanent Forum was elaborated on more than 10 years ago. I still remember the meeting held in Chimaltenango, Guatemala in 1993, which was organized by our sister Rigoberta Menchu Tum. We evaluated the International Year of the World's Indigenous People and formulated objectives and goals for the Decade. This included our vision of seeing a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples at the UN. We also strategized on how to lobby so that the Permanent Forum becomes an objective of the Decade. This is what we need to do again in this session. Create a vision of where we would like to be ten years from now and identify steps on how to reach that vision.

The foundation for building constructive dialogues between indigenous peoples, governments and inter-governmental bodies has been set within the Permanent Forum. What is needed at this point is to ensure that the gains achieved in this Forum is felt by the indigenous peoples in their communities. The ultimate measure of our success as a body, is when we see positive changes brought into the lives of indigenous peoples in terms of their rights being respected and in terms of the realization of self-determined development by them and for them.

Before I end I would like to pay tribute to Ole Henrik Magga, the first Chairperson, and all the other former members of the Forum who have contributed in shaping the Forum to what it is now. I also pay tribute to Njuma Ekandanayo who passed away while serving her term as a member of the Forum.

Finally, let me thank the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum for their efficient work in preparing this session and their relentless efforts to ensure that indigenous issues becomes a concern of the various UN bodies here in New York and elsewhere.

We certainly have a lot of work to do in these two weeks but with your active support and participation we can do all these.. Let us nurture it further to become a home for indigenous peoples in the international community. Let us continue to forge and shape the Permanent Forum as a symbol of hope for indigenous peoples.