



16/5/05, Opening, 3

Introductory Remarks by the Acting President of the General Assembly, H.E. Nana Effah-Apenteng, Permanent Representative of Ghana to the United Nations

Fourth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Monday, 16 May 2005

Madam
Members
Assembly
President
Se + General
Members
Assembly

Mr. Chairperson, Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is a great pleasure for me to address this audience. Let me first welcome the new members of the Permanent Forum who are starting their term with this session. I would like to thank the Chairperson of the Forum for inviting me for today's opening ceremony of the Fourth Session of the Permanent Forum. I look forward to seeing the report of the deliberations and the conclusions.

2. For the Presidency of the Fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly, it is very encouraging that indigenous issues are closely

linked to the priorities of the United Nations - Peace and Security, Human Rights and Development-

3. The General Assembly has been following the Permanent Forum's deliberations over the past three sessions. The dynamic approach and well-conceived strategies of the Forum to fulfill its mandate have proven very productive and contributed to increasing the awareness and the interest of the Member States for their further encouragement on indigenous issues. In my view, your accomplishments underscore the value of this important Permanent Forum for the goals and aspirations of the world's indigenous peoples. This is particularly crucial in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and I am very pleased that the Forum has decided to focus this session's special theme on "Millennium Development Goals and Indigenous Peoples."

4. Facts and statistics have shown us that indigenous peoples are suffering disproportionately ^{ably} from poverty in many parts of the

world. Many of them are still experiencing high rates of infant mortality, malnutrition and unemployment. They also face linguistically and culturally inappropriate educational systems, if they can access them at all. Since the international community is committed to accomplish the Millennium Development Goals, we must eradicate the poverty faced by millions of indigenous peoples if we want to achieve these goals . In doing so, we must have indigenous peoples themselves as part of the development processes; their participation in all stages of development is the key in this endeavour. Furthermore, we also should consider what kind of development model indigenous peoples want and need. I believe that the world has a lot to learn from indigenous peoples' wisdom and knowledge for sustainable development.

5. Nowadays the important contribution of indigenous peoples to the world's cultural and biological diversity and their contribution to the history of countries where they live are widely recognised. However, we must concede that too many of them still confront

challenges in respect of their land, their natural resources, their identities and even their existence.

6. The implementation of the Millennium Development Goals should provide the opportunity and impetus for all of us to work toward the eradication of the poverty of indigenous peoples with a view to improving their situation. In this regard, we need to make sure that the Programme of Action for the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People that the General Assembly proclaimed last December will be action-oriented^{ed} and also linked to the MDGs. Given the fact that the Second Decade of the World's Indigenous People coincides with the targeted timeframe for the accomplishment of the MDGs, i.e. 2015, we must work together to make sure that the international community will meet its commitment with regard to indigenous peoples by that time.

7. Indigenous perspectives should be integrated in the MDG processes from the beginning of setting up local and national priorities for the MDGs to their implementation and evaluation. By engaging indigenous peoples, not only indigenous peoples themselves, but also the whole world will benefit. In this regard, more than three decades of United Nations work for and with indigenous peoples delivers a powerful statement and our commitment to continue in this direction.

8. The United Nations system has taken decisive steps to emphasise inclusiveness with respect to indigenous peoples. The Permanent Forum is one of the most illustrative examples of the way the United Nations engages indigenous peoples in the decision-making processes. The Forum has an extremely important and unique role to play in integrating indigenous issues throughout the United Nations system and in engaging Member States in this work.

Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum,

9. I am pleased with the role that the General Assembly has played over the years to promote the rights of indigenous peoples, by launching the International Year of the World's Indigenous People in 1992 and in 1994 the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. As we are starting the Second Decade, the General Assembly is looking forward to receiving at its sixtieth session the proposed Programme of Action from the Secretary-General. Once again, indigenous peoples can rely on the General Assembly which will continue to hear their voices and the wise advice of this Permanent Forum.

└ Thank you.