



**UN-HABITAT**

**Fourth Session of the Permanent Forum on  
Indigenous Issues**

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Statement of

Selman Erguden  
UN-HABITAT Focal Point for Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Chief, Housing Policy and Development Section  
Coordinator, United Nations Housing Rights Programme

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Participants, Friends, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Millennium Goals provide the main guidance for all United Nations activities. Target 11, “by 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers”, and target 10 “to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation” are the specific focus areas of UN-HABITAT.

The Forum, in its previous sessions, rightly recognized the phenomenon of urbanization as an important factor affecting the lives of everyone including indigenous peoples. By its recommendations in both its second and third sessions, the Forum invited governments and local authorities to adopt policies and take necessary measures to meet the changing needs of indigenous peoples within the global process of urbanization. The Forum has also recommended that United Nations agencies, funds and programmes should increase their focus on this trend and take actions in their respective areas of work so as to improve the living conditions of indigenous peoples. UN-HABITAT was particularly requested to submit a report on this theme to this session, with particular focus on its research project through the UNHRP, jointly undertaken with OHCHR.

Madam Chairperson,

I am pleased to inform the Forum that the global research project on “Indigenous peoples’ right to adequate housing” has recently been completed and published. The report is also disseminated at the UN-HABITAT website.

This research study is based on reviews of literature related to land, housing, property and inheritance rights. Indigenous peoples’ organizations and networks have also been contacted — within the limitations of the rather modest budget of this study — and interviews were carried out with representatives of such organizations and networks, as well as with other relevant organizations. The report also includes case studies aimed at understanding the situation in Australia, Canada, Ecuador, Kenya, Mexico, and the Philippines, as well as that of the Saami population in Finland, Norway, Sweden and Russian Federation.

The conclusions of the study are grouped under the topics of housing and living conditions (with sub titles of security of tenure, affordability, habitability, availability of services, accessibility, location and cultural adequacy); laws and policies relevant to housing as they relate to indigenous people (both at international and national levels); and, housing programmes.

Madam Chairperson,

In a very short summary, the research indicates that while indigenous peoples and communities across the world are culturally quite distinct, their housing conditions and experiences are very similar. As illustrated in the case studies, indigenous peoples living within the borders of one country are not always homogenous. Each ethnic group and community has specific characteristics and has a particular relationship with the government and the mainstream population. Moreover, each indigenous community has distinct cultural expressions and approaches to their natural environment. The common condition, however, is that their housing conditions are worse than that of the rest of the population in general. Moreover, they often suffer from discrimination and exclusion in the housing sector as well. Simply put, indigenous peoples’ human rights often seem to fall on the wayside in the face of economic development interests. Furthermore, indigenous women experience gender-based discrimination with respect to a number of human rights, directly or indirectly affecting their possibility to enjoy the right to adequate housing.

The recommendations of this research initiative are intended to address the most prominent housing issues confronting indigenous men and women. These are largely aimed at governments, though some are directed at other stakeholders such as financial institutions, indigenous communities and leaders and NGOs. These recommendations are grouped around general issues, housing and living conditions, legislation and institutional framework, and other matters.

The first group comprises of issues of identity and self determination, participation in decision-making processes, discrimination and inequality, and, connecting land and housing.

Recommendations in the second group — of housing and living conditions — are formulated around the topics of addressing poverty, housing policy and programmes, ensuring housing adequacy, prevention of violence against women and children, and prevention of forced evictions.

The last group of recommendations — legislation and institutional framework — is elaborated for both international and national levels.

Madam Chairperson,

Due to lack of time, it is not possible for me to summarize all these well elaborated recommendations. I would, however, like to outline a few which we feel are the most important ones.

Governments must create the circumstances for indigenous peoples to become economically self-reliant. This can be done through a number of effective measures, the most important of which is, perhaps, ensuring that indigenous peoples retain access to their lands and other productive resources such as credit and loans, as well as education and training. Specific economic policies must be developed that stimulate employment opportunities of indigenous peoples in urban areas and development in rural areas taking into account indigenous peoples' needs, rights and modes of production. Other socio-economic disadvantages experienced by indigenous peoples such as poor health, and low levels of education must also be addressed through the provision of adequate services (both in terms of culture and quality).

Within the overall framework of enabling shelter policies and strategies, creative housing programmes and projects that ensure the availability and accessibility of affordable housing for the poorest segments of society, including indigenous people, should be developed and implemented. For example, in the urban context, governments could explore how rental accommodation might be further developed and/or improved to meet the needs of indigenous urban dwellers. Investments should be made in the development of indigenous expertise in the full range of technical capabilities for effective housing program design, delivery and management.

Indigenous peoples should be assured with legal security of tenure, which must include effective protection from forced evictions.

Measures should be facilitated to provide housing assistance targeted specifically at indigenous peoples who cannot afford the prevailing market prices of housing and for those who cannot afford to upgrade and or maintain the dwellings that they live in.

Discrimination and inequality experienced by indigenous peoples, including indigenous women, in the housing sector should effectively be addressed.

To ensure that housing is culturally adequate for indigenous peoples, they must be included in the design, development and implementation of housing projects.

Indigenous issues — with a focus on indigenous women — should be mainstreamed in relevant intergovernmental processes throughout the United Nations system.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that national human rights institutions must be available to protect human rights and specific rights of indigenous peoples.

International organisations, States, universities, research institutions and NGOs should collect detailed and accurate qualitative and quantitative information regarding the housing conditions and experiences of indigenous peoples. This information should be gathered in close association with indigenous peoples' organizations. All such information should be gender and urban-rural disaggregated. As is indicated in our report to this session, it would be useful to follow up the outcome of our recently concluded research. In this relation and if recommended and requested by the Forum, UN-HABITAT jointly with the OHCHR, through the UNHRP, can organize an expert group meeting in 2006 to review the status of the realization process of indigenous peoples' housing rights globally to identify and document best practices and report on the outcome and recommendations to the sixth session of the Permanent Forum.

In closing, Madam Chairperson, I would like to announce and kindly invite all participants to the launching ceremony of our book that I just tried to summarize. This ceremony will take place on Wednesday, 18 May at 1.15 PM in Conference Room 9. Thank you for your attention.