

Fourth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Opening Statement
by
Ms. Rachel Mayanja
Assistant Secretary-General
Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women
New York, 16 May 2005

Madame Deputy-Secretary-General,

The Presidents of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council,

Distinguished Delegates,

Friends and colleagues from the United Nations system, agencies and the NGO community,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to participate in the opening of the fourth session of the Permanent Forum and join my voice to those who welcome the Members of the Forum and all of the participants. I wish to convey to you the greetings and wishes of Mr. José Antonio Ocampo, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and Coordinator of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, who is currently on mission away from Headquarters. He will, however, be with you during the second week of the session.

The new three-year term of the Permanent Forum is a significant moment of reflection on the achievements and challenges facing this important body and the mission to which it is devoted. At the outset, I wish to pay tribute to the extraordinary contributions of the Members of the Forum during its first historic three-year term. It is with pleasure that I note that some of them are continuing during this second term. A special tribute is due to Mr. Ole Henrik Magga, the Forum's Chairperson during its first three years.

I also wish to invite all of us to pay tribute to the late Mrs. Njuma Ekundanayo, the Expert Member from the Democratic Republic of Congo, for her tireless efforts for the indigenous and tribal peoples of the world, especially those from Africa. Let us observe a minute of silence in memory of Mrs. Njuma.

Distinguished delegates

The Permanent Forum is a unique body in the United Nations and its composition, half government-nominated experts and half indigenous-nominated experts, is a testimony of an extraordinary partnership that has been built within the context of the United Nations over the past 40 years and which we would like to see duplicated at the regional, national and local level.

I welcome this year's input to the Permanent Forum that shows a clear increase in the engagement of the United Nations system and others in the work of the Forum and indigenous issues in particular. Out of the 31 pre-sessional documents, 18 have been submitted by the UN system and other intergovernmental organizations, demonstrating a steady commitment to the cause of indigenous peoples, especially at the crossroads of global efforts to reach the vision of the Millennium Declaration, including the Millennium Development Goals.

This engagement of the inter-governmental system has also been demonstrated by the fact that indigenous-related policies have been or are being developed or revised, such as for example the policy of UNDP, UNICEF's region-specific policy in Latin America, the policy of the Inter-American Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank and that of the Council of Europe.

Inspired by this commitment, the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues (IASG) has solidified its position, expanded its membership and provided substantive input to UNPFII. Now some 20 inter-governmental entities are part of the IASG, including the Inter-American Development Bank and the Council of Europe. The IASG has prepared special substantive papers on data collection, on free, prior and informed consent and on the Millennium Development Goals, thus consistently supporting the Forum's work. In addition, the

IASG achieved, in 2004, the integration of indigenous issues in the Guidelines for the Common Country Assessment and the UN Development Assistance Framework (CCA/UNDAF).

The UNPFII has also become a point of reference for major reports of the UN system including UNICEF's Digest on the Indigenous Child of 2003, UNDP's Human Development Report of 2004 on Cultural Diversity and the 2005 Report of the Millennium Project.

I am pleased to note that the outreach through the UNPFII's website has increasingly raised awareness and networking on indigenous issues, connecting the UN system, giving visibility to special issues through specialized pages, as for example on indigenous women, the Millennium Development Goals and the World Summit on the Information Society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As much as we welcome these and other institutional achievements, we cannot but be concerned over the continuing challenges that indigenous peoples face in their daily lives. We should no longer tolerate the marginalization, extreme poverty, discrimination and other human rights violations to which indigenous peoples are subjected and which often lead to conflict situations. History teaches us that indigenous peoples must be full partners in

participatory human sustainable development, in full respect for human rights. This is the road to peace and prosperity for all peoples, including indigenous peoples.

The implementation of the Permanent Forum's recommendations now becomes more urgent than ever and I therefore encourage you to further strengthen your monitoring and implementation mechanisms, so that the work of the UN system can become increasingly concrete, measurable and visible on the ground, with policy commitments, budget allocations and benchmarks regarding progress on indigenous issues.

Distinguished delegates,

I would also like to take this opportunity to say a few words in my capacity as Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. It is encouraging to see many indigenous women present today and I am pleased to note that several of the side events during this session focus specifically on the situation and rights of indigenous women.

Last year's session provided an opportunity to highlight the specific concerns of indigenous women and the recommendations adopted constitute an important framework, which should become an integral part of the deliberations of this session and other inter-

governmental processes, including the High Level Plenary meeting of the General Assembly in September and the fifth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 in October this year.

I am particularly pleased to note indigenous women's active role and their many strategic initiatives during the 49th session of the Commission of the Status of Women. As a result, the Commission adopted its first ever resolution on indigenous women. The resolution calls for the full and effective participation of indigenous women in the implementation, follow-up work and monitoring of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals.

With regard to the Millennium Development Goals, I wish to draw attention to the following seven strategic priorities proposed by the United Nations Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality:

- Expanding girls' access to education, secondary as well as primary
- Guaranteeing sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Investing in the infrastructure necessary to reduce women's and girls' time burdens
- Guaranteeing women's and girls' property, land and inheritance rights
- Eliminating gender inequality in employment

- Increasing the number of women in national and local governments
- Expanding efforts to combat violence against girls and women.

I would like to highlight the close collaboration between the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples and the UN Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality through, for example, the Task Forces on Indigenous Women, Women, Peace and Security and Gender and Water. This collaboration is an important channel for integrating indigenous women's priorities and perspectives into the work of the United Nations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite many gains achieved during the last Decade of World's Indigenous People, these peoples continue to suffer from prejudice and ill-will. They expect real solutions with their full participation from the international community. On behalf of the Under-Secretary-General Mr. José Antonio Ocampo, I pledge the full support of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to the efforts of the Permanent Forum to promote the inclusion of the special concerns and visions of indigenous peoples in the processes for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

I wish you every success in your deliberations.

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[THE ASG WILL THEN FACILITATE THE ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THE 4TH SESSION]

May I now turn to item 1 of the agenda, "Election of Officers". I now open the floor for nominations for the Chairperson of the fourth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

I recognize Mr/Ms....

[After the election takes place, the Chairperson comes to the podium and starts conducting the proceedings].