



BRAZIL

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Statements by the Delegation of Brazil

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Indigenous children and youth

May I begin by expressing to the members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues my delegation's appreciation for the convening of the high-level panel on indigenous children and youth. This is an opportunity for all of us gathered here to share views on this very important issue that is the focus of the second session of the Forum.

We must address the challenges faced by indigenous children and youth. This is a complex issue that must be tackled on all fronts. Lack of proper access to health and education, persistent poverty, exclusion and discrimination are among many remaining obstacles. Indigenous children and youth must be protected against any act of violence, abuse and exploitation. Not to mention the problems related to indigenous youth who quite often abandon their communities to look for jobs in the urban areas, with distressing effects on their self-esteem and sense of cultural identity.

The provision of basic social services and the creation of employment opportunities in their communities is an initial and necessary step. We need to ensure that indigenous youth is given a real chance to find decent and productive work.

Brazil believes that investing in indigenous children and youth is not only an effective way to eradicate poverty but also an essential means to promote and protect the socio-cultural identity and the rights of our indigenous peoples.

International cooperation in this regard is very much welcome, particularly to enhance capacity building for indigenous peoples, implement projects in the fields of education and

health, and promote awareness campaigns in the society at large concerning the rights of indigenous peoples.

In Brazil, we are committed to the implementation of educational and health programmes tailored to meet the needs of indigenous peoples, particularly children and youth.

Our indigenous population is in demographic recovery, rising faster than the average, due not only to higher birth rates and higher life expectancy, but also to lower child mortality rates. The child mortality rate in our indigenous communities, which was 94 per thousand in 2000, dropped to 53 per thousand in 2002, which means a reduction of over 40%. This positive development is a result of efforts to provide safe drinking water and sanitation to indigenous communities. Programs with this aim have benefited 1342 communities in the past four years. This year, improvements in the provision of water and sanitation services will benefit other 643 communities.

In the spirit of supporting and strengthening indigenous culture, the Brazilian Government has been providing education to indigenous communities also in their native languages. Indigenous children and youth must have access to a quality basic education, which is specific, differentiated, bilingual and intercultural, and which contributes to the strengthening of the autonomy of indigenous communities.

The establishment of the Permanent Forum has raised great expectations. We trust that this second session will allow for progress on the coordination of the activities of UN bodies and agencies with relation to indigenous issues, in particular in matters related to children and youth.

Economic and social development

My delegation attaches special importance to the discussion of this agenda item. The actions aimed at supporting the economic and social development of indigenous peoples in Brazil are the result of a meaningful dialogue between the Government and indigenous communities. The policy-making process takes into account not only the permanent participation of indigenous representatives but also the sociocultural diversity of 218 indigenous peoples in Brazil. According to the circumstances and characteristics of each indigenous community, the design of courses of action is differentiated. The implementation of policies directed towards these ends takes into account indigenous peoples' views and knowledge, in order to guarantee their identity.

The evolving discussion of indigenous issues at the international level is a powerful tool to reinforce our commitments at home. We need to reinforce the role of the Permanent Forum

as a catalyst for a broad-based partnership, involving governments, specialized agencies of the UN system, other relevant international and regional organizations, indigenous peoples as well as civil society at large. In Brazil, UN agencies have been significant partners to improve technical and financial conditions for implementation of projects in the fields of education, health, environment, human rights and eradication of poverty and hunger.

The Millennium Development Goals are an essential framework for “concerted and concrete actions”, as highlighted by the UNDP.

Brazil firmly believes that the goal of eradicating hunger and extreme poverty - the first MDG - can be achieved. This is the top priority of our Government. Indigenous peoples in Brazil are subject to similar conditions of marginalization that affect the most disadvantaged sectors of our rural population. Hence, the promotion of the rights of the indigenous peoples faces similar structural constraints as those affecting all Brazilians living in poverty.

Since January 2003, Brazil is setting up a program, called Zero Hunger, which aims at guaranteeing quality, quantity and regularity of the access to food to millions of Brazilians. The Brazilian Ministry for Food Security is coordinating an interministerial working group of indigenous communities at risk, composed of governmental and indigenous representatives. In recognizing the specific needs of indigenous peoples, this initiative encompasses not only emergency actions but also structural policies to foster economic activities towards the self-sustainability of the indigenous communities (for instance agriculture for self-consumption, cattle production and indigenous craftsmanship).

Brazil stresses the need for increasing international cooperation to facilitate the channeling of funds to projects that help to promote the economic and social development of indigenous peoples in developing countries.

Environment

The recognition of indigenous peoples’ original rights over the lands they traditionally occupy is a constitutional precept in Brazil. More than 11% of our national territory – the equivalent to roughly 1 million square kilometers – is reserved for the permanent use and fruition of the indigenous peoples.

Lands traditionally occupied by indigenous peoples are those on which they live on a permanent basis, those used for their productive activities, those indispensable for the preservation of the environmental resources necessary for their well-being and for their physical and cultural reproduction, according to their customs and traditions.

The challenge ahead of us is the need to translate the letter of the law into actual enjoyment of rights in the daily lives of indigenous peoples. The sustainable development of communities that live next to indigenous lands is fundamental to avert a situation in which poverty coupled with lack of alternatives spur the invasion of indigenous lands and the illegal exploitation of their riches.

The obligation to demarcate, protect and ensure respect for all of indigenous peoples' property stems from the fact that those lands are the reservoir of ecosystems whose sustainable management is essential for the preservation of biodiversity and the environment.

It is worth recalling that the world's largest area of rainforest is located in indigenous lands of the Amazon region.

Brazil stresses the need to defend and promote traditional knowledge associated with biodiversity. We understand that the access to traditional knowledge must respect the principles of benefit sharing, prior informed consent and identification of the origin. Patent requests must therefore respect these requirements.

A major development in Johannesburg was the decision to negotiate an international regime to ensure the sharing of benefits arising from the use of biological diversity. This will give a major contribution to the implementation of the Convention of Biological Diversity in an area of particular concern to developing countries.

This negotiating process involves the granting of adequate protection to the rights of indigenous peoples over their traditional knowledge associated with the use of genetic resources. It requires a different and more open approach to property rights. The system that has been applied so far is directed towards the rights of the individual, whereas traditional knowledge requires a sui generis system that should safeguard the collective rights of the indigenous communities.

Health

Brazil has developed since 1999 a national health policy towards indigenous peoples that devotes great attention to their socio-cultural diversity. Their organization, customs, traditions and rights over their lands, as well as the health needs of each community, are taken into account in the efforts to provide permanent physical and mental healthcare to indigenous peoples.

The participation of indigenous representatives in the policy-making is assured not only in the design of actions but also in their implementation, review and appraisal. Decentralization,

universality, equity, local participation and social control are the guiding principles for providing appropriate medical services to indigenous peoples.

These actions have been implemented through a productive partnership between federal, state, local governments and NGOs to ensure a systematic approach to healthcare for indigenous peoples.

An element that has required special attention is the deployment of staff capable of working in intercultural environments. Our capacity-building programs to support the development of indigenous health agents presuppose that the provision of knowledge and techniques does not replace but add to the set of traditional therapies. Our approach also favors a rational use of medicines. The most common diseases among indigenous peoples are respiratory and gastrointestinal infections, malaria, tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases, malnutrition and vaccine-preventable diseases.

During the panel discussions on indigenous children and youth, my delegation was very pleased to inform that the child mortality rate among our indigenous communities dropped over 40% during the period 2000-2002. A positive development that is a result of actions aimed at providing safe drinking water and sanitation to indigenous communities.

In spite of progress, it is clear for my delegation that much remains to be done. We are striving to reduce the disparities between indigenous and non-indigenous Brazilians. The standard of health of the indigenous peoples does not differ very much from the situation of deprivation that affects the poorest sectors of our population: people who neither receive sufficient preventive health care nor have access to adequate food. There is no need to elaborate on the serious negative consequences of malnutrition throughout the course of life. Our goal of eradicating hunger is a starting point to achieve the aim of providing the highest attainable standard of health to all Brazilians, especially our indigenous peoples.

Education, culture and human rights

Brazil benefits from a great confluence of cultures, races and traditions and attaches utmost importance to diversity, tolerance and respect.

My delegation has repeatedly reaffirmed our commitment to the promotion and protection of the fundamental rights of indigenous peoples. Over 200 ethnic groups and at least 170 different languages compose the rich ethnic variety of indigenous cultures in Brazil.

Our Constitution recognizes indigenous peoples' social organization, customs, languages, creeds and traditions, as well as their original rights over the lands they traditionally occupy. It also supports and fosters the appreciation and diffusion of indigenous cultures.

In the field of education, a number of indigenous communities benefit from specific schooling in their native languages, respectful of the social and cultural values of each particular group.

We are committed to providing to our indigenous peoples quality education, which is differentiated, bilingual and intercultural, and which contributes to the strengthening of the autonomy of the communities. The challenge ahead of us is to improve the qualification of teachers. The production and publication of teaching materials also needs to be properly addressed. Moreover, it is necessary to disseminate information on indigenous issues to the educational system as a whole.

The ratification without reservations by Brazil of ILO Convention n. 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries represents an important conceptual advancement and paves the way for strengthening the technical cooperation between Brazil and ILO in this field.

We fully subscribe to the Durban Declaration and Program of Action, which recognizes the need to protect indigenous peoples from all forms of discrimination.

Nevertheless, the international community still lags behind when it comes to the adoption of international instruments that protect indigenous peoples' rights.

Sensitive issues have prevented us from making progress in the drafting of a much-awaited Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples. It is about time to ensure that the working group of the CHR adopts a fresh approach to the negotiations. The completion of the drafting work will depend on a great deal of flexibility on the part of all participants.