

Item 4a

Eleventh session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**New York, 7-18 May 2012****Provisional Agenda Item 4: Human rights****Statement by Mr. Legborsi Saro Pyagbara****on behalf of the****Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations**

I thank you for giving me this opportunity to take the floor to address the eleventh session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations. I would also like to seize this opportunity to welcome the 23 beneficiaries of travel grants of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations present with us during this session.

As you well know, the mandate of the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations is to assist representatives of indigenous organizations and communities to participate in the deliberations of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Populations. The mandate of the UN Voluntary Fund was further expanded in December 2010 to facilitate the participation of indigenous peoples' organizations in sessions of the Human Rights Council, Universal Periodic Review and of human rights treaty bodies.

The presence and participation of indigenous peoples' representatives at United Nations human rights mechanisms is essential to ensuring that the concerns of indigenous peoples are brought to the attention of the international community. Without the assistance of the Fund the most vulnerable would be constrained in their ability to raise awareness of the international community on the severe issues affecting their daily lives.

Let me give you an update of the activities of the Board. In 2011, the Board held two inter-sessional meetings to consider applications to participate in sessions of the Human Rights Council and Treaty Bodies taking place between September 2011 and March 2012 and approved the allocation of seven grants for a total of \$ 16,951. At its 25th session held in February 2012, the Board of Trustees considered about 267 admissible applications for grants for a total amount of \$1,003,719 USD. However, in light of the very limited available resources, the Board was only able to select 44 indigenous representatives from the different indigenous regions of the world to attend the 11th Session of the Permanent Forum, the 5th Session of the Expert Mechanism, the 13th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

and the 20th Session of the Human Rights Council for a total amount of \$166,463 USD. The Board of Trustees also set aside a budget of \$52,394 to allow 17 representatives of indigenous communities and organizations to attend up-coming sessions of the Human Rights Treaty Bodies, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the Human Rights Council that will take place from July 2012 to March 2013.

Those are the numbers. Now what do they mean and how do they compare to previous years?

The Voluntary Fund has seen a 75 per cent decrease in the amount of contributions received by the Funds between 2008 and 2012. It is clear that it will not be sustainable for the Board of Trustees to implement the mandate of the Fund at the current levels if the amount of contributions remains the same. In short, the Voluntary Fund is facing a critical shortage in its funding and we are now in a position where the objectives of the Voluntary Fund will be compromised if further funding cannot be secured.

The Board has taken action to seek new funding through engaging with the Donor and External Relations section of the OHCHR and through direct engagement with donors, including through briefings and through letters of appeal on the occasion of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. However, much more will be required if the Voluntary Fund is to continue to give indigenous peoples a voice at the United Nations by creating the opportunity through financial support to participate in UN meetings which directly affect their lives.

I would like to share with you some of the accomplishments of the Voluntary Fund and to stress the importance of the Voluntary Fund in ensuring the active participation of indigenous peoples in the processes of the United Nations.

The Voluntary Fund had supported more than 1'450 grantees, thus providing indigenous peoples innumerable opportunities to raise their issues and concerns internationally, to share best practises in matters related to the operationalisation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the country level, to network with other indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations, and to dialogue with nation-state Governments and United Nations bodies.

For indigenous peoples representing communities who are victims of discrimination in their own States, being entrusted to voice their concerns at the international level, to participate in debates, share experiences, meet experts and dialogue with governments represents an invaluable opportunity, which nourishes their leadership skills and vision.

It is worth mentioning that in an effort to build the capacity of indigenous beneficiaries and contribute to ensuring a more effective use of international mechanisms, especially in the context of the expansion of the scope of the Fund, the Fund is also supporting targeted human rights training for beneficiaries, including during this session of the Forum, organized in partnership with DoCip.

Finally, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, I would like to express our deepest appreciation to the governments of Argentina, Australia, Chile, Cyprus, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, Germany, the Holy See, Mexico, Norway, Spain and Turkey for their generous contributions to the Voluntary Fund in 2011. We furthermore appeal to all Governments, organizations and private donors to contribute to the Voluntary Fund, if possible by the end of this year, in order to enable the Fund and Board of Trustees to fulfil its mandate in the coming year and to make sure that indigenous voices continue to reach the United Nations.

Thank You