



Docip
ARCHIVES

STATEMENT

BY

AMBASSADOR STUART W. LESLIE
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BELIZE
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

ON BEHALF OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY
(CARICOM)

TO THE FIRST SESSION OF THE PERMANENT FORUM ON
INDIGENOUS ISSUES

FRIDAY, 17 MAY 2002

Please check against delivery

PERMANENT MISSION OF BELIZE
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies
Members of the Permanent Forum
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my honour to speak on behalf of the 14 Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) that are members of the United Nations, namely Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, The Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and my own country Belize. We congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau on your election, it is important work that we are doing here and this will be greatly enhanced by your leadership.

Mr. Chairman:

The efforts to establish the Permanent Forum, which was realized during the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on Human Rights and approved by ECOSOC last July, has brought us to this moment. CARICOM welcomes the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and its role as an advisory body within the Economic and Social Council. The Permanent Forum should provide critical advice to ECOSOC in relation to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights. We welcome the Forum's participation in the work of the UN and note with satisfaction its historic role as an equal participant in these deliberations. We hope that the important work of the Forum will be realized and lead to greater participation by indigenous people with improved benefits for indigenous people.

The Secretary General in his 1996 review expressed the need for greater participation of indigenous people in our work at the United Nations. We hope that through this Forum the issues of our Indigenous peoples will receive the attention needed. We will continue to pay keen attention to the work being undertaken by the working group of the Commission on Human Rights with the objective of arriving at a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people, a declaration inclusive of their right to development and their right to full and equal participation.

The nineteenth session of the Working Group on Indigenous Population of the Sub commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights held earlier this year brought together UN Agencies, Governments and Academic Institutions. This session reviewed developments, including land issues, education and health; standard setting activities, and a review of indigenous peoples' relationship with natural resources, energy and mining companies. It is important that these issues be considered in the context of the Millennium Declaration and UN development agreements and Consensus. We also wish to acknowledge the efforts made by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) for their continuous work in the integration and development of indigenous peoples.

Mr. Chairman,

CARICOM sees itself playing an important role in the development of the world's indigenous peoples. We are aware that they are our first inhabitants; their traditions and understanding of the harmony between our lives and the environment have taught us how to better appreciate the gifts of nature. This is a small part of the contributions they have made and continues to make towards sustainable development. We therefore realize the importance of strengthening the human and institutional capacities of indigenous people to allow them to better participate in the decision making process. We remain committed to ensuring that our countries protect and improve the quality of life of our indigenous peoples, especially the children who in many of our societies are among those with less access to education, proper health care and a better environment in which to grow up. Our indigenous populations are among the most vulnerable and we must ensure that they too benefit from any advancement in our national development. In this context we support all efforts for the full participation of the Permanent Forum. We urge those with the financial capacity to contribute to the development of the organization and push for unlimited participation by indigenous individuals.

On 12 October 2000 the government of Belize signed a historic agreement with the community leaders representing the Maya of Southern Belize. This agreement recognizes the right of the Maya to the resources of the area and is based on their longstanding use and enjoyment. The agreement resulted a partnership between the government and the Maya Communities to co manage the natural resources of protected areas. Currently the Government in consultation with the leaders of the Maya Community is implementing its National Poverty Elimination Strategy and Action Plan and as a result has built schools, provide access to technology and assisted with programmes to protect and preserve the environment and bringing development to our indigenous communities while respecting and preserving their cultural values. In addition, the Government of Belize, in close consultation with the Maya and other indigenous communities in the southern part of the country, developed a draft Regional Development Plan for the South of Belize, and we welcome the Inter-American Development Bank's interest in assisting with the implementation of the development programmes outlined in the plan.

Mr. Chairman

It is all too easy to be politically correct on this issue and say the right sorts of things on behalf of those who were here before. But none of these words will improve the lives of our indigenous groups, unless we translate them into action. . We in the Caribbean believe that the Permanent Forum affords us an excellent opportunity to make our words a reality. We remain committed to ensuring that our countries preserve, protect and improve the quality of life of our indigenous people and we celebrate this historic moment welcoming the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to our Organization.