

Statement Given by Mr. Lee Sweeiston

**ILO statement under agenda item 3 (b) of the fourth session of the
UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues:**

Goal 2 of the Millennium Development Goals: "Achieve universal primary education" to be addressed under the thematic approaches of languages, cultural perspective and traditional knowledge.

- There are two major concerns related to the achievement of MDG 2 for indigenous peoples; their access to education and the quality and relevance of that education.
- With regards to assessing the extent to which indigenous children have or lack access to primary education, the lack of disaggregated data is a main obstacle.
- However, where data exists they indicate that indigenous children, and particularly girls, have not only lower enrolment rates but also lower achievements and higher drop out rates.
- A special concern of the ILO is the fact that the low educational level makes indigenous children more vulnerable to becoming victims of child labour, forced labour and other serious violations of human rights..
- There is a number of factors that contribute to this situation, including difficult access to schools, lack of investment in indigenous areas, poverty, which prevents parents from sending their children to school and cultural barriers to education of girls.
- Another set of factors are linked to the low quality and lack of relevance of the education provided to indigenous children. Education can be used as an instrument of assimilation and discriminating against indigenous cultures and languages and even when not used purposely to that effect, it may have similar negative effects if it is not tailored to respect indigenous peoples' languages, cultures and knowledge systems.
- Moreover, there are examples where wrongly designed education systems directly contribute to conflict by discriminating against particular groups.

(Ann. 26)

- ILO Convention 169 states that "... There are thus articles on the education of indigenous children in this instrument, as well as on the vocational education and training that should be provided.
- This is in line with a number of international and national policy instruments as well as with the provisions of the Dakar Framework for Action which indicates the main strategies for achieving Education for All by the year 2015.
- The Dakar Framework highlights the need to expand education for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, particularly those belonging to ethnic minorities, and also specifies the need to meet the learning needs of all students.
- Meeting the specific learning needs of indigenous children basically implies providing intercultural and bilingual education, developed and implemented with the full participation of indigenous peoples.
- The Dakar Framework for Action emphasises the importance of participation of civil society and it is absolutely crucial that indigenous peoples participate in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of education programmes as well as in educational governance and management both at local and at national levels.
- In this regard, experience indicates that the training of indigenous teachers is often a necessary starting point for further development of relevant programmes, curricula and methodologies.
- It is also important to understand that it is not only indigenous peoples who are in need of intercultural education. In countries with indigenous or tribal population, intercultural education should be offered to all students, as a means of combating prejudices and discrimination and promoting inclusive and respectful societies. This is also provided for in C169.

- Most countries have developed national Education For All (EFA) policies, but in many cases intercultural and bilingual education is not reflected in these strategies. Concerted efforts of governments, indigenous peoples, international organizations, donors and civil society partners are needed, to urgently reverse this omission.
- The ILO is contributing to the EFA strategies at all levels as an essential element of the fight against child labour. As one concrete step towards including indigenous rights in the EFA framework, the ILO will elaborate guidelines on inclusion of indigenous rights for its staff working to eliminate child labour.

Additional points briefly:

ILO concern with child labour closely linked to the provision and availability of education. Where educational facilities are not available, children are far more likely to enter the world of work too early, and in abusive conditions. *See report*

ILO is coordinating the Youth Employment Network in the UN system, which also contemplates the interface between access to schooling and the entry of young people into work. Note that it has been difficult to get indigenous issues discussed in this forum.