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United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
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Turaga Nation and Tuvauatu Komuniti

Extracted from Lavatmagemu Declaration, an outcome of Tuvauatu Indigenous Peoples' Preparatory Dialogue towards the 4<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues held from April 30 - 4 May 2005. Hosted by the Melanesian Institute of Philosophy and Technology, the Dialogue brought together 131 representatives of indigenous communities, who discussed the draft agenda of the 4<sup>th</sup> session of the UNPFII under the six mandated areas: Economic and Social Development; Environment; Health; Human Rights; Culture and Education.

Turaga Nation is the host of Turaga Development Model for Human Security; Tarigogobwatiele (indigenous system of governance); Sarabalaleo (indigenous system of parliament); Tanbunia and Tanmarahi (banking and reserve system of indigenous currencies); the Bule-Tabi Ginau Tahehei (market, barter and trading centre for indigenous products and currencies) and the Melanesian Institute of Philosophy and Technology.

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## **Statement**

In addressing the Millennium Development Goal 1: "*Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger*", to be addressed under the following thematic approach of combating poverty: *good practices and barriers to implementation*;

My presentation will focus mainly on good practices by indigenous communities of the Republic of Vanuatu and barriers to implementation. Based on our own experiences, the goals of the Millennium Development Goals in Turaga and Vanuatu indigenous context is achievable, if the process is collectively owned and implemented by effective governance systems, guided by quality spiritual leaders, at family, community, state and global levels.

In Turaga Nation our contribution to the implementation of the MDGs is administered by Turaga indigenous governance system, which the community is more familiar with. Governance in the indigenous context is link to the belief system which regulates the authority and leadership that supervises and monitors peaceful co-existence in accordance to natural laws.

Quality leadership, authority and good governance is measured by the ability to provide for individual and collective needs, uphold community cohesive spirit, the state of peace, the feeling of social security, economic self-reliance and political stability. The leader takes responsibility to compensate for peace on behalf of his community member/members.

Vanuatu indigenous concept of economy is therefore based on collective ownership, collective use of land and shared natural resources and economic benefits to sustain peaceful co-existence. Indigenous communities are pre-occupied with economic activities.

Under the term "*good practices and barriers to implementation*", the Lavatmagemu Declaration pledges to uphold the indigenous land tenure system of ownership (clan/tribal/community custodian of the land) as the only legitimate step towards Indigenous Peoples human security, food security, economic self reliance, sustainable life interdependency and freedom to exercise our fundamental human rights, therefore preventing or eradicating poverty.

The Vanuatu Constitution that established a constitutional government after 102 years of colonial rule, states in Chapter 12, that all land returns to indigenous landowners on the day of independence and it recognizes the indigenous land tenure perpetual ownership system. It also provides for government to own land only for public utilities with proper compensation of value to indigenous owners. The Constitution also provides for parliament to make land laws to be consistent with the spirit of the Constitution.

Land therefore continues to be the key to our survival. It gives life, food, shelter and identity to Indigenous Peoples. It provides our cultural, environmental, social and economic security. We respect the importance of land and its connection to the entire livelihood of Indigenous Peoples. Land is the mother of the past, the present and the future indigenous generations.

Today every Indigenous Peoples of Vanuatu own land through their clans and tribes. As such we have the land and natural resources to sustain our livelihood. Genuine indigenous communities who have not been Christianised are the most secured in terms of social, cultural, environmental

and economic sustainability. Indigenous Peoples who have been Christianised or educated in western institutions have the choice of living and cultivating the land or being employed in the labour market. The only poverty level experienced is in monetary income in the labour force. We still do not have homeless or hungry people in the streets.

### **Issues**

Three emerging issues were identified that hinder economic empowerment as rights of Indigenous Peoples and communities.

1. The issue of inaccessibility of capital finance from the government or financial institutions to enable Indigenous Peoples to invest in the development of their clan/tribal communal land for their food security, economic sustainability and survival.
2. The issue of seven Land Acts passed by parliament, which need close monitoring in their implementation in order to be consistent with the spirit of Chapter 12 of the Vanuatu Constitution on land, specifically so as not to deprive indigenous land owners of their right to ownership.

### **Recommendations**

We call on the United Nations Permanent Forum to:

- a) Request UNDP and other donor agencies to financially assist tribes and clans to invest in viable communal socio-economic development programmes to ensure continuous ownership of tribal communal land.
- b) Be support of Vanuatu Indigenous Peoples request to the government of Vanuatu to urgently review the Land Acts in wider consultation with indigenous tribes of Vanuatu, in order to avoid landless communities, poverty and future inter-communal land conflicts.

## **EDUCATION**

### **Statement**

In addressing the Millennium Development Goal 2: "Achieve universal primary education", to be addressed under the thematic approaches of language, cultural perspectives and traditional knowledge, the Lavatmagemu Declaration expresses concern that the definition of "*universal primary education*" must be inclusive of primary education in the indigenous education system and should not only refer to the dominant western system of primary education applied in most Least Developing Countries including Vanuatu.

Education in the indigenous context is linked to a creation story, the foundation of a belief system and spirituality that directs the mode of production or the evolving environment in which we live or had lived over the centuries up to now.

An individual is educated in their natural environment by characters that surround them including their parents, older peers, clan members, community chiefs, skillful and talented members of the society and wise men and women of the older generation. Each person learns what is needed in

life to be socially secured and economically self-supporting. Indigenous education is more than what is limited to a classroom situation.

Being challenged by the state dominant education system that uses only foreign languages, as mandated by the Constitution, clearly undermines the thematic approaches of language, cultural perspectives and traditional knowledge, our indigenous cultural heritage.

The Lavatmagemu Declaration recognises the Melanesian Institute of Philosophy and Technology (MIPT), now in its eight year of operation, as the ongoing coordinating centre for 7 levels within the indigenous education system.

Primary education for 6 years is the sole responsibility of the parents. It enhances the indigenous belief that a mother is the first teacher and the child receives the education foundation within the family before a child moves on and receives further knowledge and skills within a wider community.

The institute was set up after 20 years of analytical research on the indigenous value systems that should form the foundation for education in Vanuatu or any cultural society. It teaches 50 areas under the indigenous philosophy of life that respects peaceful co-existence as paramount in life. This is the way of life, which is still practiced in genuine indigenous communities of Vanuatu and has proved to be more organized, disciplined, sustainable and civilized.

Located in the Raga language community, original Raga language is the official medium of instruction, the indigenous script writing is the only writing used at the Institute and because of the important role that astrology and the lunar cycle plays in ecological interdependency, the Institute only uses and teaches in the lunar calendar. Each family who participates in the programme pays an affiliation fee in both the indigenous currencies and modern currency.

Education and training is not centralized but coordinated through 200 communities in three indigenous nations. There are 200 community coordinators, who are part of fully paid community workers within the indigenous governance system.

Indigenous education is all about every thing that people come into contact with everyday and it teaches practical skills for their roles in society and for their responsibilities at different stages of human development. It is all connected to natural laws that nurture natural peace, human values, truth, respect, justice, quality leadership and economic production. It is about every thing that people come into contact with everyday and it teaches practical skills for specific roles and responsibilities at different stages of human development, to be socially secured and economically self-supporting.

### **Issues**

Four issues were identified in running the Melanesian Institute as a coordinating centre:

1. The issue of mother tongue not being used in state primary/secondary and tertiary education because the Vanuatu Constitution only recognizes English and French as ongoing medium of instructions, an ongoing tool used by state to eliminate indigenous cultural heritage.

2. The issue of non recognition for support from the national government or the UNESCO towards sustaining the indigenous education institutions for life sustainability, which begin at family homes, nakamal, nasara and the Melanesian Institute of Philosophy and Technology.
3. The issue of poverty associated with the ongoing dominant education system shaping children at an early age to become commodities in the labour market and to aspire for material goods which cannot be met when there is limited jobs and lack of sufficient monetary income to sustain modern living.

### **Recommendations**

We call on the United Nations Permanent Forum to

- a) Support any dialogue on the need to amend the Vanuatu Constitution to recognize indigenous languages to also become medium of instructions.
- b) Recognise and support indigenous community initiatives to take ownership of our own education institutions, so that we can teach and preserve indigenous philosophy of life in our own mother tongues, the central element that will empower us to preserve our indigenous values.
- c) Request UNESCO, UNICEF and UNDP to provide financial support to indigenous education institutions such as the Melanesian Institute of Philosophy and Technology, towards the production of educational materials in own script writing and language, such as instructors handbooks, curriculums, story books etc.
- d) Request UNESCO, UNDP and ILO to financially assist indigenous education and training institutions that provide appropriate training, knowledge and skills transfer needed to develop their own land for sustainable livelihood.

## **ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE**

### **Statement**

The indigenous concept of the environment encompasses the spiritual, physical, cultural, customary and traditional environment, under which the people have lived and continue to live in harmony and survived over centuries. Vanuatu genuine indigenous communities are spiritually connected to our indigenous origins and beliefs, land, language, genealogy, kinship and distinct cultures. One hundred indigenous languages are spoken. We still maintain strong family ties as clans and tribes and we live in communities and maintain our community spirit wherever we move and settle. We agree on consensus and we still believe strongly in collective rights and freedom, communal ownership of land, cultural heritage, collective responsibilities and obligations and the traditional leadership systems.

The indigenous philosophy of life is to co-exist peacefully and communicate effectively with everyone and everything that share the same multi-dimensional natural world for inter-dependency. There are creation and natural laws that regulate, supervise, protect, guide and monitor our relationship with spiritual energy sources of life: the space/sky, the sea and the land. The natural

principles of environmental governance play a major role in sustaining our peaceful environment at all levels.

Peace is paramount and is collectively owned. It becomes the central focus to all conduct of activities. Everyone is nurtured and taught their responsibilities within the family and the community to respect peace in the words that are spoken, the actions taken and the attitudes portrayed. This is to ensure that there is respect to natural laws and protocols, not to disturb the spirit of peace within an individual, family, tribe or community environment.

It becomes a natural obligation to take collective ownership, responsibility and accountability to peace. It also teaches and encourages people to take control of their own lives so that they can determine their own social, economic and political status.

Leadership skills, knowledge and acquiring of wisdom begin at an early age and continue through adulthood. Leadership for good governance is groomed at an early age and is spirituality guided to coordinate and monitor the state of peace at all levels and in all the institutions including the family, clan, tribe, village and the islands.

### **Issues**

Three issues were identified:

1. The issue of lack of commitment from the state in fully applying the Preamble of the Vanuatu Constitution which states:  
*"We the People of Vanuatu.....hereby proclaim the establishment of the united and free Republic of Vanuatu founded on traditional Melanesian values....."*
2. The issue of lack of appropriate educational materials in indigenous languages to effectively teach environmental studies and raise awareness in biological diversity interdependency.
3. The issue of respecting indigenous sacred marine and land areas to protect biological species and for food security.

### **Recommendations**

We call on the United Nations Permanent Forum to:

- a) Support the right of indigenous leaders to exercise their authority in all matters relating to indigenous governance, environmental governance and cultural life without fear of reprimand by the foreign system of governance.
- b) Advocate for the recognition and teaching of creation laws, natural laws and customary laws as foundation for cultural survival.
- c) Support request to UNEP and other agencies to provide finance for the production of environmental education materials in indigenous languages.

## **HEALTH**

### **Statement**

Positive spirituality to life and food are the most vital elements that contribute to sustaining a strong and healthy human body. Our spirituality, food and healing sources are the sea, land, water and air. We need to be in constant communication with them and protect their health so that they can protect our health.

We recognize the importance of natural generational foods that are produced consistently according to Vanuatu/Pacific temperatures. We will continue to produce essential foods that contribute to building our natural immunity against diseases. We need to produce enough food annually that contributes to building a strong and healthy family, community and nation. We will continue to ban processed food in Turaga and Lolovini nations.

Having knowledge of herbal treatment of all diseases including HIV/AIDS, we are ready to start treating patients from Vanuatu. We are proud that our various programmes on food production, food security and traditional healing knowledge are making progress in serving the indigenous communities. We are determined to educate our indigenous community on the importance of taking responsibility of our own health, giving special attention to reproductive health of our indigenous youths, the pregnant and nursing mothers.

We will continue to resist the immunization of our children, dispersing of modern medicine when no proper explanation, consent or prior diagnosis has been made.

### **Issues**

Eight major issues were identified:

1. The need to teach and transfer traditional healing knowledge to members of the indigenous communities so that they can take ownership of own health and build our own natural immunity.
2. The need to produce enough food that provide natural immunity and vital elements to body building as well as sustaining annual food supply.
3. The issue of allowing import on processed food with no proper assessment of essential vitamins composition.
4. The need to have communication facility, transport, a strong building for safe keeping of records, and to accommodate patients and mothers in various weather conditions.
5. The issue of modern medicine not recognizing indigenous healing methods and promoting dependency on modern medicine and medical practitioners, to the point of dispersing medicines without proper diagnosis of the persons condition or proper explanation of the side effects, resulting in increase liver conditions.
6. The issue of WHO administering vaccination on children at schools without prior consent of parents, the latest being the vaccination against Hepatitis B without any knowledge of

Hepatitis B natural immunity that has is passed from parents to children in Melanesia including Vanuatu.

7. The issue of WHO administered region-wide vaccination against elephantitis without Indigenous Peoples right to consent and proper explanation to prove that the population is at high risk to contract the disease.

**Recommendations:**

We call on the United Nations Permanent Forum to:

- a) Support indigenous communities who are in total control of their food security and indigenous healing methods for family and community health and food supply, including protection against HIV/Aids.
- b) Recognise the threat to Indigenous Peoples health posed by experimenting vaccinations on indigenous children, replacing natural immunity from natural foods and making them vulnerable to incoming diseases.
- c) Advocate for WHO assistance in providing basic health equipment, transport, telecommunication and sterilized bottles to organized indigenous health centres such as Tansip Life Centre that serves a large populated area.
- d) Advocate for WHO to respect the wishes of indigenous communities who take ownership of their own health by resisting or banning of:
  - Vaccination because of lack of or insufficient information.
  - modern medicine to sustain their natural immunity
  - processed food
- e) Request the World Health Organisation, UNFPA and UNICEF to finance indigenous assessors to conduct follow up assessment on the health conditions of indigenous communities in Vanuatu after administering any immunization programme.
- f) Dialogue with WHO and appropriate UN agencies for the financial support needed to pilot herbal treatment for TB, Malaria and HIV/Aids.

**HUMAN RIGHTS**

**Statement**

Under agenda item 4 (a) Human Rights with special emphasis on an interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Indigenous Peoples, the Lavatmagemu Declaration reiterated the indigenous concept of collective rights as an overarching Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination and decolonisation.

Human rights and freedoms in the indigenous concept are collectively owned and monitored. Individual rights and freedoms are practiced within the parameters of communal rights and provide



a sense of belonging to the extended family, clan, tribe and community for social security, access to land and to live in peace. Individual rights, freedoms, identity and dignity entail having the right to parental care, love, guidance, discipline in order to respect peace at all levels of society. Every individual is taught their individual rights and freedom and how, where, when and to what extent these can be practiced within the context of collective rights and freedom.

### **Issues**

Four issues were identified

1. The issue of continuous violation of Indigenous Peoples right to practice our creation laws, apply our indigenous system of governance and indigenous leaders exercising their chiefly authority.
2. The issue of violating the rights to receive education in our mother tongue and teaching our indigenous philosophy of collective rights which results in children and youth not respecting indigenous concept of human rights.
3. The issue of indigenous knowledge bio-piracy in kava, food crops, herbal medicine and healing knowledge/practices without proper prior consultation, acknowledgement of the communal knowledge custodians and communal economic benefits.

### **Recommendations**

We call on the United Nations Permanent Forum to

- a) Support initiatives to dialogue with the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Indigenous Peoples regarding various violations of Indigenous Peoples rights.