

First Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
New York, May 14, 2002

Agenda Item 6 – Environment

Statement by Jannie Lasimbang, Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact

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I would like to first of all thank the UN Voluntary Fund for enabling my participation in this historic meeting of the Forum.

AIPP is heartened that the environment-related processes in the UN has placed importance on indigenous peoples' efforts and knowledge on biodiversity conservation, particularly the special knowledge of women. Indigenous peoples in Asia have participated actively in key meetings such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, Commission on Sustainable Development, Intergovernmental Forum on Forest and the WSSD preparations.

Although it is an achievement to have a comprehensive workplan on indigenous peoples in the CBD, there is constant parrying between member states and indigenous peoples because states want to subject its implementation to domestic laws and the rigid stand of some states on the collective nature of our knowledge, on customary law and on the issue of free, prior informed consent. The same goes to other processes where regression on the understanding and definition of terms by governments keep pulling us back.

Traditional environmental management system is a way of life for indigenous peoples in Asia. It is based on the concept that all matters – plants, animals, insects, birds and humans - have a spirit, and as part of God's creation, must be respected. We see the conservation of the environment in a holistic manner and the practices are entrenched in our daily life. Just because this concept, principles and practices are not expressed in a way that can be understood by others espousing western environmental conservation system, it should not mean that indigenous peoples can be accused of environmental degradation. We recognize that the practices are eroding in our society and would like to work in partnership with governments to revitalize them.

Recognition of indigenous peoples as **rightholders** to their resources is also critical and urgent in at environment-related UN negotiations. Indigenous peoples have been revitalizing their system of ensuring environmental integrity by linking it to their rights over their traditional territories.

Our recommendation to the Forum would be as follows:-

1. To request relevant UN agencies and Programmes to acknowledge the efforts of indigenous peoples, and in particular recognise the knowledge of indigenous women in agriculture and medicinal plants, by ensuring that sufficient funds are allocated to indigenous peoples' organizations to strengthen traditional environmental management to ensure the integrity of their territories;
2. To request such Agencies and Programmes to support activities that involves partnership between indigenous peoples and governments in understanding environmental issues such as dialogues, collaborative programmes; and
3. That the Forum form a Commission that would look at the definition of pertinent terms through consultations with indigenous peoples and disseminate these findings to the relevant UN Agencies and Programmes, *as well as provide clarification on these terms during relevant fora.*

Thank you, Kotohuadan.