

10th Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Statement by UNESCO

Agenda Item: Environment

17 May 2011

UNESCO would like to begin by expressing a warm welcome to the new members of the Permanent Forum and offer, in particular, its congratulations to Ms Myrna Cunningham for her appointment as Chair. We look forward to working with the entire Permanent Forum team, as well as with the Secretariat and its hard-working and most competent new Chief, Ms Chandra Roy.

Under this agenda item on Environment, UNESCO would like to draw attention to some of its current activities addressing indigenous issues.

In June 2010, a conference co-organized by UNESCO and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity pressed for the integration of biological and cultural diversity into development cooperation strategies and programmes. The conference was well attended by indigenous participants including Mrs Elisa Canqui Mollo, who represented the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and participated in a Roundtable on Biological and Cultural Diversity for Sustainable Development. The conference resulted in the 2010 Declaration on Bio-Cultural Diversity and a draft Joint Programme between UNESCO and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD) containing a number of proposed actions that are of relevance to indigenous peoples. The draft Joint Programme was acknowledged by the World Heritage Committee at its meeting in Brazilia in July 2010. It was also welcomed by the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD held in Nagoya, Japan, in October 2010. The CBD Conference of the Parties recognized the Joint Programme as a 'useful co-ordination mechanism to advance the implementation of the Convention and deepen global awareness of the interlinkages between cultural and biological diversity'. State Parties and other

relevant stakeholders are invited to 'contribute to and support the implementation of this joint programme'.

Last year, 2010, was the International Year of Biodiversity. At the launch of the International Year held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, Mrs Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, then Chair of the Permanent Forum delivered an address on 'International Actions for Solving the Biodiversity Crisis'. As a contribution to the International Year, UNESCO's Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems or LINKS programme launched in July 2010 a two-volume publication entitled 'Mayangna Knowledge of the Interdependence of People and Nature'. This publication of more than 400 pages in both Mayangna and in Spanish, culminates 6 years of UNESCO work with the Mayangna of the BOSWAS Biosphere Reserve in Nicaragua. The books document in the language and words of the Mayangna, their intricate knowledge of aquatic ecosystems with a focus on fish and turtles. Since November 2010, at the request of the Mayangna, the project continues with a new focus on reinforcing indigenous language and knowledge in the formal education system, by incorporating the Mayangna book into school curricula. This effort, in collaboration with the Nicaragua Ministry of Education and UNICEF, is supported by the Royal Embassy of Norway.

While indigenous peoples are amongst the most vulnerable to impacts from global climate change, they may also be amongst the resourceful when it comes to coping and adapting to change. Responding to the PFII recommendation to 'guarantee the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in appropriate processes and environmental conventions, such as those on (...) climate change', UNESCO-LINKS continues to work at bringing recognition to indigenous peoples' concerns, knowledge and adaptation strategies in the face of climate change. Funded by Denmark, the project 'On the Frontlines of Climate Change' is implemented by UNESCO in partnership with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights. It includes an online forum that reaches an estimated 60,000 people worldwide and a growing network of community-level projects.

As an extension of this work, UNESCO is now partnering with UN University, the Secretariat of the CBD, UNDP-GEF SGP and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in the organization of expert meetings to be held in Mexico City, Mexico, in July 2011, and in Cairns, Australia, at the end of this year. These events address the essential role of local and indigenous knowledge in monitoring climate change impacts and adaptation, and are specifically designed to provide inputs to the authors of the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report that will be published in 2014. In the context of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, UNESCO-LINKS is also partnering with the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee, the World Meteorological Organization and Conservation International, in an effort to build collaborative partnerships in Africa between nomadic pastoral peoples and meteorologists. The aim is to support indigenous pastoral livelihoods by improving the relevance of scientific weather prediction in the context of climate change, while also bringing recognition to traditional meteorological understandings and knowledge.

In the Arctic region, UNESCO has responded to the PFII recommendation that the Arctic Council, UNEP and UNESCO follow-up on the International Experts Group Meeting on Climate Change and Arctic Sustainable Development, held in Monaco in 2009. The proceedings of that meeting have been published in the book *Climate Change and Arctic Sustainable Development: scientific, social, cultural and educational challenges*, which is available in English and French. The book draws upon the knowledge, concerns and visions of prominent Chukchi, Even, Inuit and Saami leaders from across the circumpolar North, leading Arctic scientists in the natural and social sciences, and international experts in education, health and ethics. These voices emphasize the urgent need for a sustained interdisciplinary and multi-actor approach to monitoring, managing and responding to climate change in the Arctic.

To this end, UNESCO-LINKS extends its appreciation to the Sami Council for its invitation to a remarkable event held in Kautokeino, Norway, in March 2011. Combining together a Sami Council seminar on traditional knowledge, a meeting of the Rectors of University of the Arctic and a circumpolar gathering of the World Association of Reindeer Herders, this exceptional happening underlined once more

the critical importance of bringing together indigenous peoples from across the entire circumpolar North to share knowledge, concerns and challenges in the face of global climate change. UNESCO looks forward to furthering this joint work as follow-up to the experts meeting in Monaco and in the context of the forthcoming IPCC event in Mexico on indigenous knowledge and climate change impacts and adaptation.

To dialogue further with UNESCO on its programmes and policies of relevance to indigenous peoples, we warmly invite you to a Side Event on “Indigenous Peoples and UNESCO: Opportunities to Reinforce Engagement” that will take place tomorrow Wednesday from 10 to 11:30 in Conference Room B in the North Lawn Building.