



General Assembly
GA/11558

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York
Sixty-ninth General Assembly Plenary 5th Meeting (PM)

Two-Day World Conference on Indigenous Peoples Concludes with Resounding Support for Outcome Document, High Expectations for Sweeping Change

The action-oriented provisions of the Outcome Document of the first World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, adopted yesterday, would lead to sweeping changes for current and future generations, participants heard at the closing of the two-day summit.

“Let me further echo this call to action,” said General Assembly Vice-President Laurie Phipps, urging Member States, the United Nations system, civil society, and the private sector to “do your part to keep the momentum of our discussions moving forward in a positive and productive manner”.

The document, she said, represented a balance between indigenous peoples’ concerns and what Member States could agree upon and would serve as a blueprint for the future, building on the commitments set forth in the Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples. She said the Outcome text was unique because of the inclusive way in which indigenous peoples and Member States were turning their shared goals into a reality.

The document also focused on the rights of indigenous women and addressed the intractable problem of violence against women, while speaking to the challenges faced by indigenous youth, the difficulty in sustaining indigenous languages, the need to preserve traditional knowledge and the requirement to ensure sustainable livelihoods. Those issues formed the core of the broad, integrated agenda called for by indigenous peoples over the last two decades.

Jan Eliasson, Deputy Secretary-General, said the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was the foundation and a guiding star, while the Outcome Document was an inspiration and the path forward. Working together, indigenous peoples and Member States had identified important priorities and necessary actions on land, resources, justice systems, education, health and development.

However, globally, indigenous peoples continued to lag behind others on education, health, employment and even life expectancy, he said. The United Nations was currently identifying its global development priorities beyond 2015, and it was essential to make indigenous peoples’ issues a part of that new agenda. The desired future would value and preserve diversity, and required a more equitable and sustainable use of the world’s resources.

“Nobody can do everything, but everybody can do something,” he said, going on to explain that the United Nations was a reflection of two realities — a reflection of the world as it was, which

was “not a pretty place”, with conflicts, inequalities, poverty, violence and violations of human rights. However, the Organization was also a reflection of the world as it should be, and the job at hand was to diminish the gap between them. It might not be bridged entirely, but it could be diminished, even if just by an inch, he said.

Round-Table Discussion III

Following the two round tables held yesterday, a third was convened this afternoon, co-chaired by **Pita Sharples, Minister of Maori Affairs of New Zealand** and **Joan Carling, representative of the Asia Indigenous Region**.

Delivering opening remarks, Mr. **SHARPLES**, said that as with many indigenous peoples, Maori had a history of colonization that resulted in a significant loss of traditional lands, which affected their ability to access traditional resources. Their struggle was a familiar story. Sustainable economic development that was consistent with cultural values was also a central pillar for indigenous peoples, and Member States needed to recognize the positive contribution that successful indigenous economies made to national and regional economies.

Sustainable economic development enabled indigenous peoples to take the lead in decisions that affected their own lives, he said. While there was much to celebrate, both as States and as indigenous peoples, there were still many areas where improvement was needed. It was necessary to communicate, to educate one another, and to continually develop collective and individual knowledge. He closed with the indigenous phrase “Whatungarongaro te tangata, toitu te whenua,” which translates to “while people disappear, the land remains”.

Ms. **CARLING** said she was pleased to note that the Sami representatives from the Russian Federation had joined the session, despite obstacles posed by that country. Lands, territories and resources were at the heart of the collective survival of indigenous people, who were the peoples of the land, even before States were formed. A tipping point was now being reached, with continuing land dispossession, destruction and militarization of lands, territories and resources.

There were some positive developments regarding legal rights in some countries, but major challenges prevailed, she said. The Outcome Document provided key action points for States to fulfil their obligations to indigenous peoples, whose informed consent was essential, prior to changes made to their lands. She urged further steps to protect indigenous peoples’ rights.

When the floor was opened to broader debate, **GABRIEL QUIJANDRIA**, Vice-Minister of Natural Resources’ Strategic Development of Peru, said his country recognized indigenous peoples’ right to land ownership. However, that issue was still unresolved, since only 30 per cent of indigenous people had property rights over their land. It was thus very important to ensure proof of ownership in order to provide more guarantees over legal and illegal activities there.

ROGER CHO, a representative of Pacific Caucus, said that the land didn’t belong to people, but rather the people belonged to the land. He expressed support for the Outcome Document, but stressed that it was just one step in the fight for indigenous people, and expressed his hope that in the future a post of a High Commissioner for the rights of indigenous peoples would be established.

CARLOS ALEMAN CUNNINGHAM, Coordinator of the Government of the North Caribbean Autonomous Region of Nicaragua, explained that land was an essential part of

indigenous peoples' daily lives, inextricably linked to their identity. He echoed the call for continued efforts to achieve self-determination.

MAANU PAORA (elder Maanu Paul), a representative of Nga Kaiawhina A Wai 262, New Zealand, said indigenous people were guardians of the land and custodians of important biological heritage. He called on States to observe Paragraph 8 of the Outcome Document and cooperate with the indigenous peoples to develop and implement national action plans. In closing, he said: "Signing the Document is the same as saying you are pregnant. You cannot be half pregnant. Rise up to meet the challenges!"

The representative of the Solomon Islands, **COLLIN BECK**, said that in his country, half a million people spoke 87 languages. For them, land was not just an asset; it was sacred. The biggest challenge was to manage modern and traditional worlds, and to ensure indigenous peoples become active participants, and not just spectators. Post-2015 sustainable development goals were not only about poverty eradication, but also about healing the health of the planet. He finished by saying that "indigenous peoples live not for themselves but for the common good of serving one another".

Also delivering statements were representatives of **Canada, Costa Rica, Iran, Papua New Guinea and Paraguay**.

The representatives of the following United Nations entities and observers also spoke: **Director General of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO); United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); and International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN)**.

Also taking the floor were speakers representing **Asia Caucus, Endorois Welfare Council, International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI), Indigenous World Association of Nakoia Ikaika Kalahui Hawaii, Arctic Caucus, the Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples North East Zone, and the Greater Sylhet Indigenous Peoples Forum of Bangladesh**.

Chief **Perry Bellegarde of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations** also spoke.

Panel Discussion

Patricia Balbuena, Vice-Minister for Interculturality of the Ministry of Culture of Peru, and **Jannie Lasimbang, Representative of the Asia Indigenous Region**, co-chaired a round-table discussion on "Indigenous priorities for the post-2015 sustainable development agenda". Panellists included **Wu Hongbo, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs; Albert Deterville, Chair of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and Saoudata Aboubacrine, Representative of the Africa Indigenous Region**.

Opening the discussion, Ms. **Balbuena** said her Government had actively participated in talks to establish sustainable development goals. In coordination with Mexico, Guatemala and Costa Rica, it had participated in the discussions of the Open-ended Working Group on Sustainable Development. The Government had made the rights of Peru's indigenous peoples a priority. Its programmes and policies were geared towards erasing discriminatory practices, ensuring food security, providing health-care services and offering bilingual

education to indigenous peoples.

Peru was the first country in Latin America to comply with International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 on the rights of indigenous peoples, she said. Six consultations between Peru's indigenous peoples and their respective State authorities had led to satisfactory agreements concerning such concerns as land titles and natural resource use. The Prime Minister had set up a commission to combat violence against indigenous communities.

Ms. **LASIMBANG** said that the World Conference's Outcome Document would set the context for future work on indigenous peoples' issues. She highlighted operative paragraph 37, which notes the commitment of States to give due consideration to all rights of indigenous peoples in the post-2015 development agenda. Indigenous peoples comprised 15 per cent of the world's poor, but just 5 per cent of its total population. Non-sustainable development and extractive industry practices directly impacted them. The post-2015 development agenda must address this situation and their overall well-being, and it must be aligned with the post-2015 development framework. Commitments made in the Outcome Document provided impetus for the Declaration to be integrated into the post-2015 goals.

Mr. **WU** said development had often led to the destruction of indigenous peoples' political, economic, social, cultural, educational and knowledge systems. The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues had focused two sessions on the Millennium Development Goals and had made numerous recommendations to States, the United Nations system and others to ensure the goals responded to indigenous peoples' specific concerns. In the past, indigenous peoples' rights had been largely invisible. Drawing on the lessons of the Millennium Development Goals, the post-2015 development agenda must be bold and bridge the gaps in the Millennium targets to ensure inclusion of indigenous peoples' rights and data.

Mr. **DETERVILLE** said the post-2015 development agenda must include indigenous peoples' rights. At its seventh session this past July, the expert session had held a panel discussion on the need for free, prior and informed consent from indigenous peoples to be included in the post-2015 agenda. He was concerned about its absence from the draft and the fact that indigenous peoples were paired with other vulnerable groups, despite the fact that they faced their own specific challenges. The rights of indigenous peoples to education, particularly their rights to integrate their own educational perspectives, culture and knowledge, must be central to the fourth goal on education.

Ms. **ABOUBACRINE**, a member of the Tuareg tribe that inhabited the Saharan interior of North Africa, recounted the hardship suffered by the Tuareg and other indigenous peoples throughout Africa. Even prior to colonization of the African continent by the Western world, indigenous peoples' rights had been sacrificed to make way for development. In the Sahel and in Central and West Africa, "how could one speak of the development of people without ensuring protection of their basic human rights and rights to their land?" she asked. She recounted the story of a relative's home being burned just because its owner was a Tuareg tribe. The socioeconomic and cultural rights of the Tuareg and indigenous peoples must be upheld. Otherwise they would fall victim to the deadly Ebola virus, terrorism and other global scourges. She paid tribute to Tuareg civilians killed by the military and expressed solidarity with them and those detained in Burkina Faso.

When the floor opened for discussion, the representative of **Guatemala** said that his country had developed a strategy that had allowed it to respond to the "different dynamics of development", pointing to a national agenda with a vision for 2032, the so-called Plan

K'atun, which supported indigenous peoples' ways of life, customs, traditions and forms of social organization. His Government had developed specific mechanisms and reforms focused on such areas as racism, interculturalism, environment, crime prevention, migration and other policy areas aimed at eliminating inequality.

The representative of **Nepal** pointed to constitutional, legal and administrative steps in her country, including formation of a National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities, to protect indigenous peoples from discrimination, ensure their proportionate representation in education and the labour market.

The representative of **Papua New Guinea** warned of a threat to the very survival of indigenous communities in the Pacific, where several island States were at risk of submerging completely due to a rise in sea-level caused by climate change.

A representative of the **Central, South America and the Caribbean Caucus** stressed the importance of land access for indigenous peoples, and of obtaining their free, prior and informed consent for use of any land they inhabited.

A representative of the **Indian Law Resource Center** pointed to the prevalence of violence against indigenous women in the United States and elsewhere. In the United States, one in three indigenous women would be raped in their lifetime.

A representative of the **Te Rarawa and Ngati Kuri Maori people of New Zealand** said that there was a "profound functional relationship" between the sustainable development goals outlined in the Outcome Document and the rights of indigenous peoples. Moreover, indigenous peoples' ability to realize these rights was tied to their right to privacy, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom from unreasonable search and seizure and freedom of press. Without securing these freedoms, these goals could not be fully implemented.

A representative of the **World Food Programme (WFP)** said indigenous people must be at the centre of WFP's Zero Hunger Challenge. The 2014 State of Food Insecurity in the World indicated that although world hunger continued to decline, putting the Millennium hunger target within reach, food insecurity and poor nutrition remained development and health issues for indigenous people worldwide, even in countries showing good overall progress towards erasing hunger. Most food-insecure people were already feeling the effects of climate change. Indigenous knowledge had been instrumental in coping with the resulting effects.

Also participating in the discussion were representatives of **Botswana, Chile, Ecuador, Russian Federation and the United States**.

A representative of the **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)** also spoke.

Interventions were also made by representatives of the **Arctic Indigenous Caucus, Fondo para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indigenas de America Latina y Caribe, Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum and Kapaeng, Kalipunan Ng Mga Katutubong Mamamayan Ng Pilipinas, Pacific Disability Forum, African Union Commission, International Indian Treaty Council and International Development Law Organization**.

Closing Remarks

JAN ELIASSON, Deputy Secretary-General, said that the United Nations was proud to work closely with all indigenous peoples and their partners around the world to secure their rights and address their concerns. The Conference for Indigenous Peoples built on the work and results since the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. That text was the foundation and guiding star, while the Outcome Document was an inspiration and the path forward. Working together, indigenous peoples and Member States had identified priorities and necessary actions on land, resources, justice systems, education, health and development.

However, globally, indigenous peoples continued to lag behind others on education, health, employment and even life expectancy. He said that he intended to deal with those problems along with the Secretary-General by building on the momentum generated already by the current Conference. The United Nations was currently identifying its global development priorities beyond 2015, and it was essential to make indigenous peoples' issues a part of that new agenda. The desired future would value and preserve diversity, and required a more equitable and sustainable use of the world's resources.

It was the collective responsibility of Member States, indigenous peoples, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, civil society, and the academic world to transform the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into reality. This would require determination, tenacity, appropriate legal framework, human and institutional capacities, and finally, political will. As had been stated earlier, political will was a renewable resource.

GHAZALI OHORELLA, Representative of the Pacific Indigenous Region and Co-Chair of Interactive Round-Table Discussion I, said that, if we continued in this spirit, our work would no longer seem impossible, but inevitable. The Outcome Document was a milestone for indigenous peoples, and the time had come for the United Nations to move from promises to action, and include indigenous peoples in all areas of its work.

He noted that several speakers called for an appointment of a senior official for indigenous peoples' issues, and numerous participants had committed to fully support a system-wide action plan. Placing indigenous peoples' lands in the hands of indigenous people would lead to the realization of their rights; they needed to be the protagonists of their own development. Indigenous peoples were the "miners' canary" of the world, and the mercury in the barometer of the successes and failures of the United Nations. And, he concluded, this round table was a "map of the stars" to help realize the ancestors' dreams.

DAVID CHOQUEHUANCA, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bolivia and Co-Chair of Interactive Round-Table Discussion II, said that the focus of that segment had been on implementing the rights of indigenous peoples at the national and local levels. Many speakers had welcomed the Outcome Document and taken note of the specific commitments to action by States and the United Nations.

Both Member States and indigenous representatives, he said, had pointed to advances at the national level in implementing the rights of indigenous peoples, including the recognition of their rights in national constitutions, laws, policies and programmes. At the same time, speakers had referred to ongoing challenges and to the role of the United Nations system in advancing rights. The Outcome Document advocated the enhanced participation of

indigenous representatives at the United Nations, which was welcomed by both Member States and indigenous representatives.

Ms. **LASIMBANG**, Secretary Director of Pengarah Urusetai and Co-Chair of the Panel Discussion on indigenous priorities for the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, said that indigenous peoples should participate actively in the implementation of that agenda. In order to achieve sustainable development, it was imperative to be respectful of indigenous peoples' development, according to their own aspirations, needs, and with respect to their cultures and identities.

Detailing the contributions of panellists, she said that indigenous people were among the poorest in the world, and did not have the same access to social services. For the post-2015 agenda, the Declaration should be integrated into that agenda, and she urged constructive dialogue in that regard.

Ms. **CARLING**, Co-Chair of Interactive Round-Table III, said that representatives had spoken of their close relationships to the lands, territories and resources, as that was at the heart of their survival and development. That relationship was outlined in various articles of the Declaration and the Outcome Document. However, speakers pointed out that there was a lack of recognition of those lands, territories and resources, and of indigenous peoples in general.

Some States, she said, had recognized indigenous peoples' land rights, and taken measures to protect sacred sites and heritage areas. She urged the United Nations to implement programmes that addressed indigenous peoples' management of lands and food resources, and which enhanced biodiversity and food security.

She said indigenous peoples had now reached a tipping point on their continuing collective survival as distinct peoples, due to the dispossession, destruction and militarization of their lands, territories and resources. For many decades, those issues had been their primary and urgent concern. In many instances, indigenous lands had been occupied, and activities such as timber and mining and the creation of national parks, among others, had led to their forced evacuation, without prior informed consent. That was increasing poverty, marginalization and conflicts.

With that, she called for "legal security" of lands to maintain sustainable development. She also urged partnerships between indigenous peoples and Governments. States, she said, should establish impartial processes to adjudicate indigenous peoples' rights over resources, as reflected in the Outcome Document.

SETAREKI MACANAWAI, Indigenous Disabilities Representative, said he was grateful to be the voice of the voiceless, of those at the margins of society. He believed that indigenous persons with disabilities were overrepresented among those living in absolute poverty.

The Outcome Document, he said, included meaningful references to indigenous persons with disabilities. Only an inclusive and empowered society would ensure that no one was left behind, and that meant that decisions affecting indigenous persons with disabilities should not be taken without their full participation. He stressed the importance of including them in the post-2015 development agenda.

Ms. **PHIPPS**, **Vice-President of the General Assembly**, reading a **statement from the General Assembly President**, said that during the round-table discussions, speakers stressed the vital importance of implementing the Declaration. Echoing that call to action, she urged Member States, the United Nations system, civil society, and the private sector to "do your part to keep the momentum of our discussions moving forward in a positive and

productive manner". The Assembly's adoption yesterday of the Outcome Document marked a new chapter in the engagement between indigenous peoples and Member States, she said. Its action-oriented provisions would lead to broad changes for current and future generations of indigenous peoples, with its focus on the rights of indigenous women and the intractable problem of violence against them, as well as the challenges faced by indigenous youth. Also dominant was the difficulty in sustaining indigenous languages, the need to preserve traditional knowledge and the requirement to ensure sustainable livelihoods. Those issues formed the core of the full-spectrum, integrated agenda sought by indigenous people over the last two decades.

Mr. **SHARPLES** delivered a closing prayer for the Conference.

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