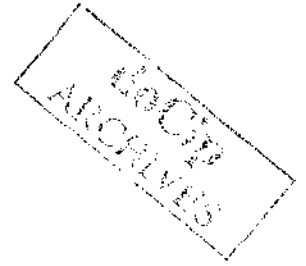


Third Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Statement by Mr. José Antonio Ocampo
Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs

10 May 2004



Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Honourable Elders,
Distinguished representatives of Member States, Indigenous Organizations and Non-governmental Organizations,
Representatives of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations
Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to participate in the opening of this third session of the Permanent Forum and to join all of us in welcoming the Members of the Forum and all of the participants, especially the women who came in large numbers this year to United Nations Headquarters in New York to attend this session with its special theme devoted to them.

As a Latin American, I am deeply aware of the rich cultures of indigenous peoples. I am thus especially pleased that the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum is housed in the Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and can assure you of our full commitment to the objectives of this Forum.

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is a unique body in the United Nations and its composition, half government-nominated experts and half indigenous-nominated experts, is testimony to an extraordinary partnership that has been built within the context of the United Nations and which we would like to see reach the regional, national and local level.

I welcome this year's input to the Permanent Forum that shows a clear increase in the engagement of the United Nations system and others in the work of the Forum. Out of the 41 pre-session documents, 25 have been submitted by the UN system and other intergovernmental organizations. In addition, the responses received are increasingly concrete, indicating that agencies, funds and programmes are in a constructive dialogue with the Permanent Forum.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The marginalization, extreme poverty, discrimination and other human rights violations to which indigenous peoples are subjected and which often lead to conflict or threat of extinction can no longer continue. We must learn from history that participatory human sustainable development, in full respect for human rights, is the road to peace and prosperity for all peoples, including indigenous peoples.

The Millennium Declaration, including the Millennium Development Goals, has been the expression of the willingness of the international community to focus their attention on the widespread problem of social exclusion. Indigenous peoples should thus be a major focus in their implementation. If we are to achieve many of these goals by the target year of 2015, we must complete soon the pillars that guarantee that they will be achieved. These pillars, which include institutions, programming and funding, must be built with the participation of indigenous peoples, with indigenous women playing a central role in the process.

Data collection and disaggregation for indigenous peoples, a major methodological issue identified by the Forum, will need to be tackled for measuring progress towards the MDGs and beyond, so that indigenous realities stop being invisible or distorted in statistics. I am looking forward to the Forum's further recommendations in this matter after the very productive workshop held earlier this year following the mandates of the Forum and ECOSOC.

I take note of the Forum's efforts to enhance its work by strengthening implementation and monitoring. The work of the UN system must become increasingly concrete, measurable and visible on the ground, with policy commitments, budget allocations and benchmarks regarding progress on indigenous issues. In that regard, the Forum may wish to give consideration to some innovative ideas, such as devoting a day of each session to a geographical region.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In his speech on the indigenous children in Cuzco, the Secretary-General of the United Nations reminded us of: *"...how fragile the existence of many indigenous peoples is. In the [Andean] region—and in other parts of the world too—indigenous lands, waters, languages, health and cultures, long devastated by the legacy of colonial oppression, continue to be under grave threat. The environment is being destroyed and indigenous peoples are often excluded from decisions that crucially affect the life of their communities"*.

These are the concerns that led to the creation of this Forum, and that bring us here. We have a long and arduous road ahead for overcoming these conditions with the full participation of the indigenous peoples. This Permanent Forum is called to play a catalytic role in this fight for justice in the indigenous part of our world.