

NATIONS UNIES
HAUT COMMISSARIAT AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME



UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



Check against delivery

Third session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
Monday 12 July 2010

**Statement by Melakou Tegegn
on behalf of the
Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations**

I thank you for giving me this opportunity to take the floor to address the third session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations. I would also like to seize this opportunity to welcome the 36 grantees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples present with us during this session.

As you are aware, the mandate of the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations is to assist representatives of indigenous peoples, organizations and communities to participate in the deliberations of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

At its 23rd session held in February 2010, the Board of Trustees considered 330 admissible applications for travel grants amounting to approximately 1,350,000 USD and allocated 101 travel grants from the different Indigenous regions of the world to attend the Permanent Forum and the Expert Mechanism.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I would like to express our deep gratitude to Algeria, Chile, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Guatemala, Holy See, Mexico, Spain and Venezuela for their generous contributions to the Voluntary Fund. Though we have ensured maximizing the donations contributed to the Voluntary Fund thus far, it is with regret that we note a trend of a net decrease in donations, from 537,269 USD in 2008 to 257,329 USD in 2010. We therefore appeal to all Governments, organizations and private donors to consider contributing to the Voluntary Fund,

if possible by the end of this year, before the next session of the Board to be held in February 2011, in order to enable the Fund and Board of Trustees to fulfil its mandate in the coming year.

The Fund is celebrating this year its twenty-fifth anniversary. Since its inception in 1985, the Voluntary Fund has given indigenous peoples with a voice at the United Nations by creating the opportunity through financial support to participate in UN meetings which directly affect their human rights, lives and conditions. The Fund has also provided Indigenous peoples innumerable opportunities to raise their issues and concerns internationally, to network and launch projects with other indigenous peoples, indigenous governments, non-governmental organizations and to dialogue with Governments and other United Nations bodies and independent experts. These activities have led to developing and increasing Indigenous leadership capacity.

The Fund is now actively engaged in enhancing the substantive capacity building of the Fund's beneficiaries through the organisation of training and briefing sessions. At its last session, the Board met with the Indigenous Peoples' Center for Documentation, Research and Information (DOCIP) and agreed to enhance collaboration, including through the organisation of preparatory meetings and human rights mechanisms training sessions. This is but one example of the partnership with civil society that the Fund and its Board promotes with international and regional organizations that are working with and servicing indigenous peoples at the international level.

The Fund has a multiplier effect and its impact transcends the participation of beneficiaries in the international meetings. It extends to the active transfer of knowledge, skills and information at the grassroots level. The Fund has established the practice by which beneficiaries are requested to conduct awareness-raising meetings in their local communities and at least three follow up activities to inform members of their organisations and communities on the issues, proceedings and decisions of the international meeting they have attended.

The Board of Trustees of the Fund remains convinced of the fundamental importance of providing assistance to indigenous peoples in order for them to participate in United Nations meetings of vital importance to them. Furthermore, the Board wishes to highlight the necessity of supporting the direct participation of indigenous peoples in other international human rights mechanisms that can also address and respond to indigenous concerns in an effective manner.

Therefore, the Board expresses its strong support to the proposal made last year by the Mechanism to the Human Rights Council to follow up further on the recommendation made by the Expert Mechanism at its first session to expand the mandate of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations to cover also the sessions of the Human Rights Council and those of human rights treaty bodies. The Board also welcomes Human Rights Council resolution 12/13 of 12 October 2009 requesting to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a detailed document outlining the practical implications of a change in mandate of the Voluntary

Fund for Indigenous Populations in particular if it is expanded, the current working methods and resources of the Fund.

Since its inception the Fund's mandate has been enlarged five times to service the needs of indigenous peoples and of the United Nations. The Fund has been at the forefront of the debates and deliberations on indigenous peoples issues at the United Nations. It has thus contributed to support international normative and institutional developments related to indigenous rights that have occurred over these past twenty-five years. The Voluntary Fund supported over 1,300 grantees directly engaged in the preparation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the negotiations related to the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, to the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people and more recently the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The proposed enlargement of the mandate of the Fund by the General Assembly would once again demonstrate the capacity of the Fund to respond positively to demands expressed by indigenous peoples and provide new ways to bring local indigenous realities to the international arena. The extension of the mandate of the Fund would increase the diversity of indigenous peoples' representatives including those from under-represented regions who do not have adequate financial resources, to contribute to the work of the Human Rights Council and treaty bodies. It would also help to ensure that indigenous peoples' representatives use effectively the Expert Mechanism and Permanent Forum and contribute substantively to their core mandates and channel their human rights concerns to the mechanisms that are most suitable for addressing their concerns.

Thank you for your time and attention.