



UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at its 11th Session, 2012

Thursday, 10 May 2012: Item 5: Report of the annual session of the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples

Statement delivered by:

Ms. Juanita Castaño, Director, New York Office,

United Nations Environment Programme

Mr. Chair, Members of the Forum, Secretariat colleagues and friends, distinguished Delegates.

Since this is the first time that UNEP is taking the floor at the 11th session, I would like to congratulate the Chair to his election for this session.

At the start, I want to align UNEP with the statement of the Chair of the Inter-Agency Support Group (IASG) on Indigenous Peoples issues.

For UNEP, it is our honor to address the 11th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues today and I would like to assure the Forum of UNEP's commitment to advance the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and its implementation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the last 25 years, while the world economy has more than doubled, 60% of the world's ecosystems have been degraded or used unsustainably. Each year, 13 million hectares of the world's forests – the size of Greece – disappear. According to UNEP's Year Book 2012, 24 per cent of the global land area has suffered declines in health and productivity over the past quarter century as a result of unsustainable land management practices.

Greenhouse gas emissions continue to climb, pushing the planet towards the 2 degrees Celsius threshold above which we know that some environmental changes could become irreversible. The impacts of climate change could trigger increasing numbers of displaced peoples, with many indigenous communities – such as the Arctic peoples and the small islanders – the first ones to suffer from such consequences.

Check against delivery

UNEP has made efforts to address these and other challenges and I would like to highlight a few examples.

- The newly created Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) will focus on sustainable management of the world's biodiversity and ecosystems. UNEP has been requested to continue to facilitate the Platform on an interim basis, in collaboration with UNESCO, FAO and UNDP. The IPBES will respond to requests for scientific information related to biodiversity and ecosystem services from Governments, relevant multilateral environmental agreements and UN bodies, as well as other relevant stakeholders. The IPBES will include indigenous knowledge and diverse knowledge holders in its work. Additional information can be found on its website – : www.ipbes.net.
- UNEP continues to be engaged with indigenous peoples' issues through its collaborating center based in Norway. GRID Arendal has undertaken important work on the situation of nomadic herders who face challenges from climate change, unregulated mining, logging, loss of access to natural resources and unsustainable tourism. The recently published report about the challenges faced by Mongolia's' reindeer herders, "Changing Taiga", will be presented at tomorrow's panel discussion on Central and Eastern Europe, the Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia.
- As you know, UNEP is intensively involved in the preparations for the Rio+20 Conference which we consider a historic opportunity to take ambitious decisions that will shape the "Future We Want" in light of our considerably greater understanding of sustainable development 20 years after the 1992 Earth Summit. Indigenous Peoples and their organisations have participated in the Rio+20 preparatory processes and UNEP has provided opportunities to indigenous peoples and other Major Groups to discuss their views, and to be involved in UNEP's work towards Rio.

Overall, UNEP continues to place high importance on the involvement of Indigenous Peoples in its work and UNEP's Policy Guidance on Indigenous Peoples will soon become operational. We would like to encourage Indigenous Peoples and their organisations to continue their collaboration with UNEP and thank them for the support we have received.

To finalize, Mr. Chairman, UNEP wishes you a successful continuation of the Forum and we look forward to the results of your deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.