



**UNFPA INTERVENTION ON BEHALF OF THE UN INTER-AGENCY
SUPPORT GROUP ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ISSUES– DIALOGUE
WITH UN AGENCIES**

Thursday, MAY 10TH, 2012

**Mr. Chair,
Distinguished members of the Forum,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Dear indigenous friends,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

I take the floor in my capacity as the Chair of the Inter-Agency Support Group (IASG) on Indigenous Peoples issues to present the report of the IASG annual meeting in 2011. But first of all, let me join those who preceded me in congratulating you for your appointment as the new Chair of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and in extending a word of appreciation to Myrna Cunningham for her invaluable contribution during her tenure.

The Inter-Agency Support Group (IASG) is a mechanism for international cooperation on indigenous peoples' issues in relation to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and other inter-governmental bodies' and entities. Amongst its various functions, the IASG on indigenous peoples issues organizes an annual meeting to consider ways of strengthening cooperation among its members to promote the human rights and well-being of indigenous peoples through joint activities and other forms of cooperation; and to analyze recommendations of the UNPFII and contribute to their implementation on the basis of the mandates, resources and capacity of each organization. This work remains "principled and norm-based" and sees a constructive engagement on human rights as central to all its work.

Guided by these objectives, UNFPA chaired the Annual Meeting of the IASG on Indigenous Peoples Issues in New York City in November 2011. The meeting benefited from the participation of delegates from fifteen UN Agencies, the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and two Forum

members. The main substantive sessions of the IASG annual meeting dealt with the topic of 'population, development and indigenous peoples' issues, including population dynamics, urbanization and housing, data gathering and indicators, indigenous peoples and the environment, and sexual and reproductive health of indigenous women.

Understanding population dynamics, including growth rates, age structure, fertility and mortality, and migration is central to the goals of the international community to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development. Furthermore, a proper identification of the various population groups that conform a society and the assessment of the different ways in which these groups are affected by development problems are critical pre-requisites to address the factors explaining why certain groups are excluded from economic and social development. To a great degree, even today, indigenous peoples still remain invisible, either, because they are not formally recognized as a specific group with their own rights and entitlements, or because of the lack of available and reliable statistical data.

Where data is available, it indicates that indigenous peoples' life expectancy is below that of non-indigenous populations. Moreover, death rates are persistently higher at all ages and birth rates are also higher than national averages. A higher maternal mortality rate among indigenous women is a consistent trend, as it is the case in other social areas such as education, nutrition, access to water and sanitation and housing.

In the face of these disparities, Governments as the primary duty-bearer - with the support of the international community and the UN system - have the responsibility to collect pertinent and quality data in all spheres of life through censuses and surveys, as well as through improved administrative registries, while taking into consideration indigenous peoples' views and perspectives.

Within the framework of the 2010 round of population and housing censuses in the Latin American region, the Fondo Indígena, ECLAC, UNFPA, UNICEF, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation are working to ensure the visibility of indigenous peoples in national statistics. This effort has included the promotion of commissions for institutionalizing indigenous peoples' issues in national statistical institutes and for involving indigenous communities in data-collection processes.

Despite their technocratic nature, indicators are indispensable tools to keep track of the advancement of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), ILO and the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples Issues are working on the development of a conceptual and methodological framework on indicators for capturing implementation through *structural*, *process* and *outcome* indicators. Additionally, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) is operationalizing *outcome* indicators related to land tenure, traditional languages and traditional occupations.

Data disaggregation on different grounds including, sex, age, ethnicity, disability, economic quintiles and place of location is also fundamental to identify situations of multiple discrimination faced by indigenous peoples as well as patterns of discrimination within indigenous communities. However, having a more thorough understanding of these realities will require the investment of additional resources in strengthening the capacity of National Statistical Institutes to collect data and to make it available in accessible formats so that it can be effectively used by policy makers and indigenous peoples in the formulation of development strategies and policies.

The issue of Indigenous Peoples right to health, including the sexual and reproductive health of indigenous women and girls, illustrates well the importance of understanding the multiple deprivations underpinning health problems. The deprivations experienced by indigenous women and girls are often related to intersecting forms of discrimination on the grounds of sex, age, ethnicity, disability, place of residence, and/or any other status. As evidenced in some Latin American Countries, adolescent girls usually have to withdraw from the social sphere when they reach puberty, thus limiting their access to social services and life opportunities. This social pressure often results in early school dropouts, limited mobility and autonomy, early marriage, an increased vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence, and higher adolescent fertility rates than urban adolescents.

In promoting culturally acceptable health approaches, PAHO, UNFPA, and Family Care International have emphasized the important role that capacity development and the empowerment of indigenous women organizations and networks play in fighting multiple forms of discrimination and in advancing the reproductive health agenda, both within indigenous communities and in regards to the State. UNFPA's "Abriendo Oportunidades" programme in Guatemala provides a good example of the potential that women's empowerment can have in improving the health outcomes of indigenous women and girls.

The problems above described are usually compounded by rural poverty, which is increasingly pushing the indigenous youth to migrate to the cities in search for new opportunities. Over the past year, IASG joint activities led by UN-Habitat have contributed to improving the living conditions of Indigenous peoples in cities, through their engagement with the implementation of relevant guidelines, research and capacity building activities, such as, for example, the project coordinated by WHO and UN-Habitat to produce a draft policy guide to Indigenous peoples' health in cities. More efforts are yet needed to address the specific rights of Indigenous peoples, towards sustainable urban development and the realization of the right to the city and the right to adequate housing for all.

Following recommendations from the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to make more accessible to indigenous peoples the policy guides, tools and practices generated with the support of UN agencies, funds and programmes, the IASG on Indigenous Peoples issues is in the process of defining ways to integrate knowledge management platforms. Making this wealth of knowledge more accessible to indigenous peoples will provide a valuable technical basis to advance the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the country level, including its integration in UN Development Assistance Frameworks and country programmes.

Another important interagency initiative working to translate the Declaration into action on the ground is the UN Indigenous Peoples' Partnership (UNIPP), a collaborative undertaking by ILO, UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF. In 2011, UNIPP adopted a four-year strategic framework and started the implementation of six pilot projects in Bolivia, Nicaragua, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Nepal and Southeast Asia.

Dear Chair, distinguished members of the Forum,

Recognizing indigenous peoples in laws and visualizing them in national statistics are important, yet, insufficient steps. The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples promotes their right to freely pursue their development, as active agents of change rather than passive recipients.

The process leading to Rio+20 has given proof of the ability of indigenous organizations to engage proactively in the global development arena. The UN system has also been instrumental in this process. For instance, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has involved indigenous peoples in the

consultation processes, including the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum, and regional consultation meetings in 2011 and has engaged in constructive dialogues on the Green Economy discourse with Indigenous Peoples. As the negotiation process on the Outcome Document of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development reaches its final stages, the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples Issues would like to encourage member States to give due consideration to the views of Indigenous peoples major group submission for the zero draft of the outcome document of Rio + 20, which are derived from the five key messages in the "Manaus Declaration: Indigenous Peoples In Route To The Rio + 20 Conference".

The post 2015 development debate offers an opportunity to position indigenous peoples issues in the future development edifice so that the development objectives that will replace the current MDGs contribute to the wellbeing of indigenous peoples from the perspective of their individual and collective human rights.

Learning from the experience developed at Rio + 20, the Permanent Forum may wish to consider a recommendation for member States and the UN system to engage proactively with Indigenous Peoples in the context of global, regional and national consultations on the post 2015 development agenda. At the global level, the Permanent Forum may wish to recommend the appointment of at least one eminent indigenous person in the post 2015 High Level Panel of the UN Secretary General. At the country level, UN country teams could be encouraged to include indigenous organizations in the composition of advisory panels for the same purpose.

Many thanks, Mr. Chair.