

Introductory remarks by Ms. Paimaneh Hasteh
Study on engaging indigenous peoples more inclusively in the disaster risk reduction process

I would like to recognize Mirna Cunningham, member of the Forum, who is the co-authored of this study.

Indigenous peoples have suffered from the imposition of development models that have devastated their communities, and these communities are now at risk. While it is common to see indigenous leaders plan and anticipate ways to take advantage of the opportunities made possible by the assets and the dynamic energy of a community, it is less often that they seriously consider potential risks.

Indigenous peoples around the world have used their traditional knowledge, the methods and practices that originate within their communities and are maintained and disseminated through non-formal means developed over several generations, to prepare for, cope with and survive disasters over the millennia.

The present study is intended to stimulate discussion and act as a catalyst for creating opportunities for sharing experiences and knowledge about disaster risk reduction among indigenous peoples and their communities in nations throughout the world.

It should also serve to generate debate, raise questions and find solutions that will result in the reduction of loss of life and property, and the restoration of the environmental, social, cultural and spiritual balance in communities affected by disasters.

In addition, the study will highlight current efforts that, while not originally designed with indigenous peoples in mind, may be useful to indigenous community leaders as they look for opportunities to reduce risks and plan appropriate response strategies to mitigate adverse environmental, economic, social, cultural or spiritual impacts.

It is also intended that the issues articulated by indigenous peoples themselves will be considered in the planning and outcomes of the fourth session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2013, the United Nations World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in 2014 and the third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015.

In conclusion, I would like to mention that there is an urgent need to increase dialogue among Governments, institutions and indigenous peoples

concerning the identification, incorporation and value of indigenous knowledge into all disaster risk reduction projects and programmes. It is equally important that the decision-making power always stay in the hands of indigenous peoples, with special attention to the challenges of local power relations, the possible exclusion of certain members of the community and the avoidance of cultural imposition. Priority must be given to working with and through local partners.

In addition, since the danger of commercialization is always present, attention must be paid to avoiding any chance of exploitation during the transfer of indigenous knowledge.

In closing, I would like state that the use of indigenous knowledge for disaster risk reduction is important because it represents self-reliance and sustainability. The strength of societies is based upon their ability to thrive with their own capacities and resources.

Natural disasters do not exist, as affirmed in the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, only natural hazards. Disasters happen when hazards strike unprepared societies. There is no better way of confronting a disaster than to prevent it from happening. Dependency has stemmed from intervention, and this has in turn provoked vulnerability. Indigenous knowledge not only has the potential but also the power to cope with disaster, as proven by its survival over thousands of years.

Thank you

NOTE: In case you would like to mention *“I would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance in drafting of the present report to the Center for Public Service Communications and the Center for Autonomy and Development of Indigenous Peoples”*.