

 UN-HABITAT	Fifth session of United Nations PFII, 15-26 May 2006, NY
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Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Members of the Forum, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a pleasure to observe that each session of the Forum is better organized compared to the previous one, and work undertaken and underway is becoming increasingly effective. Congratulations to all those contributing to these accomplishments, particularly to colleagues in the Secretariat.

As all participants of the previous session will recall, UN-HABITAT and OHCHR through their joint Housing Rights Programme have published, last year, a research report entitled “Indigenous peoples’ right to adequate housing: A global overview”, and the Forum, taking note with appreciation of the conclusions and recommendations of this report, has recommended that UN-Habitat, jointly with the Office of the High Commissioner, organize an expert group meeting in 2006 to review the status of progress on indigenous peoples’ housing rights globally and identify and document best practices, and report on the meeting’s outcome and recommendations to the Forum at its sixth session.

This planned EGM is expected to address current situations where indigenous peoples are subject to discrimination and inequality in diverse aspects of housing, including laws and policies; allocation of resources for housing, including credit; practices of private landlords in the rental market; and policies and practices in place to counter such discrimination and inequality. The focus will also be on indigenous poverty, disadvantage and discrimination with respect to the right to adequate housing, particularly in relation to the fact that the status of indigenous people is closely interconnected with dispossession from their lands. In many instances, this dispossession has negative impacts on their lives in several ways often urging them to migrate to cities and towns.

In the cities, indigenous people often experience extreme poverty, rampant discrimination and a loss of spiritual, community and family ties as well as indigenous culture and values. With the prohibitive costs of home-ownership, their housing conditions are often very poor. Many live in informal settlements and slums where they are subjected sometimes to forced evictions; others are left homeless. In many cases, indigenous women, whether in urban or rural areas, have to live under more severe conditions than indigenous men. Poor and inadequate housing conditions, characterized by overcrowding, lack of privacy, and absence or inadequacy of sanitation and basic services, exacerbate women’s vulnerability to domestic violence. Another phenomenon is the fact that frequently, indigenous women are unable to acquire housing independently from men. In some circumstances, society alienates women who live alone — be they divorcees, widows, single women, or married women who are separated from their husbands. Additionally, often due to customary law, traditions and culture, women do not have the opportunity or possibility to own, acquire, or inherit property.

Through the deliberations of this EGM, successful programmes and projects which are often those that have involved indigenous peoples in meaningful and diverse ways, will be identified and further documented. Examples include initiatives in Canada, where social/public housing owned and operated by indigenous peoples and designed in a culturally sensitive manner has proved very popular with indigenous tenants; in Finland, where the Government implemented a loan and grant scheme for the Saami enabling them to build their own houses on their own lands; and in Kenya, where Maasai women

have been part of a project that enables them to use indigenous skills and materials to redesign existing housing so that it responds better to their needs.

These informative and useful outcomes will be accomplished if and when this EGM could be materialized. Unfortunately, as of today, we have not been able to secure funding for this endeavour. We have contacted a number of governments with the hope that they could host such a meeting and/or provide funding for this purpose, but we have not yet had any positive response. Taking this opportunity and on behalf of both UN-HABITAT and OHCHR, I would like to invite all those governments and organizations which have a capacity to do so, to support and facilitate the organization of this EGM. This activity would at the same time very much comply with the outcome of the recently held EGM in January in NY on "Millennium Development Goals, Indigenous Participation and Good Governance", which recommended, amongst others, conducting further research, analysis and discussions on the implications of increased urbanization for indigenous peoples.

Madam Chairperson:

UN-HABITAT is addressing most of the issues raised in the fourth and previous sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues within its general activities aimed at improving living conditions of the poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, including indigenous peoples. Within this framework, UN-HABITAT's work on security of tenure provides scope for a strategic partnerships with indigenous peoples in addressing the complex nature of land issues. UN-HABITAT's work on poverty alleviation and MDGs has the potential to establish direct links with indigenous people's livelihoods. The gender policy of UN-HABITAT aims to address the Habitat Agenda commitment to gender equality. Activities of UN-HABITAT in the field of disaster mitigation, post conflict reconstruction and safety in the context of human settlements, is related to the housing and living conditions of indigenous peoples in most cases.

After the Tsunami disaster in South East Asia last year, for example, UN-HABITAT took part in the relief and reconstruction activities jointly with other United Nations agencies, particularly with UNDP which is still ongoing. In the Aceh region in Indonesia, such efforts focused on land issues and were undertaken in three dimensions: (i) relocation of entire settlements where destruction was significant; (ii) readjustment within the existing settlements where destruction was partial; and (iii) settlement upgrading where *in situ* improvement was feasible. Land issues being fundamentally important for indigenous peoples, these activities are directly affecting the lives of many of them. UN-HABITAT's participatory mapping and Community Action Plan process enables community members to take an active role in (re)establishing formal occupancy rights throughout the Tsunami affected areas. The mapping of plot ownership in new or rehabilitated villages will become the basis for the registration and provision of land certificates by the National Land Agency in Aceh. The current number of families directly assisted in Aceh by UN-HABITAT is around 5,000.

Finally, Madam Chairperson, I would like to bring to the attention of the Forum that the Third Session of the World Urban Forum will soon be held in Vancouver, Canada from 19-23 June 2006. This is a big event where all stakeholders in the human settlements development field get together to discuss relevant issues from their specific interests. We believe that the topic of indigenous peoples and the impacts of urbanization on their livelihoods is very important. There are several events in the programme of the World Urban Forum related to this area. To name just a few, "Picturing ourselves: Video as tool for defining community" which is organized by the National Film Board of Canada, is a round-table on indigenous peoples (21 June); "Urban Aboriginal Diversity: Supporting Communities", "Aboriginal First Nations Housing in Canada" are two of the networking events which are on housing of indigenous peoples.

You are all invited and welcome to participate in the third session of the World Urban Forum.