



GENERAL DEBATE

Statement by Roy Laifungbam CORE Manipur

Mr Chairman

This being the first time I am addressing this Forum on behalf of my organisation CORE MANIPUR and my people of Manipur in India's North Eastern region, I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate you upon your election as the first chairperson of this momentous first session of the Permanent Forum. I also wish to congratulate the members of this Forum upon their nominations.

It is a privilege and honour for me to address this Forum under agenda item 5 – General Debate.

I wish to acknowledge, as indeed many have before me, that the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues constitutes an extremely significant landmark in the history of the United Nations, the beginning of a new chapter that is founded on the international recognition of indigenous peoples and nations. This first session is therefore an historical event having no precedence and signifies the progress made in the United Nations on indigenous peoples' rights. The most significant development is that this Forum provides the opportunity for all of us to meet and address indigenous peoples issues on an equal basis, and we need to be aware of this basis throughout the work of the Forum.

Mr Chairman

I wish to take this opportunity to address one substantive issue relating to the Permanent Forum - the question relating to the Forum's mandate and its fulfilment.

The mandate of this Forum is sufficiently broad to enable it to address the spectrum of issues of concern to indigenous peoples and nations, which fall within the mandate of ECOSOC.

Furthermore, referring to ECOSOC resolution 2000/22, which recalled the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Review of the existing mechanisms, procedures, and programmes within the United Nations concerning indigenous people", (A/51/493) and noted in particular the striking absence of a mechanism to ensure coordination and regular exchange of information among interested parties — Governments, the United Nations, its agencies and inter-governmental agencies and indigenous peoples — relating to the issues of indigenous peoples, we have a unique opportunity here to develop and place such a mechanism.

I believe that the opportunity of coming together on an equal basis to address this aspect of the mandate is a critical premise from which we can begin to work together. Many of my sisters and brothers as well as governments and UN agencies have acknowledged and called for this Forum to develop an effective and new mechanism for a coordinated effort among all partners to address indigenous issues in a holistic manner that clearly establishes the linkages between these different issues, but almost no one has an idea of what this mechanism is to be.

Also, we have the repeated call for a comprehensive review of the policies and programmes among all specialised bodies and agencies within the United Nations System relating to indigenous peoples.

The Inter-agency Support Group as it is today, clearly cannot fulfil the expectations of such a new mechanism or task.

According to the information received from the inter-agency support group (document E/CN.19/2002/2) the constituent agencies of inter agency support group have agreed to work within their respective mandates and for the benefit of indigenous peoples. The ISG also proposes to meet at least twice a year. But the ISG has not also thrown any light on exactly how such support as required by the mandate of this Forum would be provided. While The ISG itself is indeed a welcome beginning, we find it inadequate to in fact address the situation of indigenous peoples holistically.

Each agency is effectively immersed in a conservative and narrow approach to one aspect of human development: be it health for the WHO or children for the UNICEF.

Further more, many these specialised bodies, such as ILO and WHO, are not obliged to report to ECOSOC at all. As such, within this present framework at the UN, the system obligates none to participate in the inter-agency processes, nor be held accountable to it or to indigenous peoples.

The step towards maximising cooperation between agencies for the purpose of improving the present status of information exchange and sharing of experience, the present arrangement is not new at all. The inter-agency group has been meeting annually for some years now and there is very little progress in terms of coordination of activities or any meaningful exchange of information or of ideas emerging from these meetings. I believe that it would be indeed a difficult challenge for agencies to develop the holistic approach essential to adequately address the requirements of this Forum's mandate without some clarity and agreement on this issue first.

While each agency will no doubt bring to the support group the expertise, access to resources and information relating to work that has been done or is in process under the mandates of their individual agencies, the support group would need to expand its mandate to evolve eventually but without delay into a coordinating body much as the UNAIDS was set up as with inter-agency constituency, for example, with a very specific mandate to address a particular concern at global, regional and national levels – in our case, indigenous issues within the mandate of the ECOSOC.

Only such a concretely consolidated approach would, we believe, contain the potential to address the acknowledged pressing concerns of indigenous peoples and permit the Permanent

Forum to effectively carry out its mandate in full and with the full support of its parent body, the Economic and Social Council.

We recommend that the permanent Forum request ECOSOC to immediately and as a priority establish an open-ended inter-sessional working group of the Permanent Forum with open participation of State governments, representatives from the UN specialised agencies and bodies, and representatives of indigenous peoples and nations, which should meet once every year for 10 working days with the following mandate:

1. Conduct a comprehensive review of the mandates, policies and programmes including financial and budgetary aspects of the various specialised agencies within the UN system that relate to indigenous peoples and their issues;
2. Identify good and bad practices, gaps, problems, hurdles and obstacles in addressing the issues of indigenous peoples within the United Nations systems that fall within the mandate of the Economic and Social Council;
3. Further identify and recommend an effective and permanent mechanism within the United Nations, with the necessary and appropriate support, to ensure coordination of activities and processes within the UN system and regular exchange of information among interested parties - Governments, the United Nations, its agencies and inter-governmental agencies and indigenous peoples and nations - that relate to indigenous peoples.

Mr. Chairman, I request you and your expert colleagues to lend great thought to this aspect of the mandate of this august body particularly in the light of the resolution of its parent body, the ECOSOC as we believe that the advisory role of the Forum to its parent body can be best served by establishing the most comprehensive and sustainable means to address the issues before this newly established Forum.

Thank you