

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

First Session, New York, 13-24 May 2002

Agenda Item 6, REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM
RELATING TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: Economic and Social Development

Consensus Statement by the Indigenous Caucus

**REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM
RELATING TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: Economic and Social
Development**

It is always said that indigenous peoples are among the poorest of the poor and that they belong to the most vulnerable sectors of society. And yet it is also known that the indigenous peoples live in territories that are very rich with natural resources. This ironical situation explains the fact that indigenous peoples territories are mainly regarded as resource bases which can be plundered in the name of national development. While more and more foreign and national money are brought in to finance the extraction of primary resources, national budgets for basic social services become less and less.

The profits derived from these extractive activities remain in the hands of foreign and national corporations. The behaviour of corporations on indigenous lands remain unregulated and they remain unaccountable. In the meantime, indigenous peoples are either driven away from their own lands or are left on their own to rehabilitate their devastated and degraded territories. They also have to repair the broken family and community relationships caused by the divide and rule methods employed by the corporations and even the governments. In several communities there are still ongoing conflicts which remain unresolved. This is the state of economic and social development in many indigenous peoples communities.

What role did the United Nations system play in perpetuating or mitigating these situations? Is it still possible to expect the UN to play a role in making corporations accountable for their violations of the rights of indigenous peoples and the destruction of the environment? The reports prepared for this meeting by the various UN agencies and programmes, including the World Bank and the WTO do not provide us information nor recommendations on these situations. What we know is that in the past the UNDP has provided technical assistance to some member states to help liberalize their laws on mining. We also know that the UN through the UNEP, UNDP and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) gave money for national integrated protected area system projects. Some of these projects are good but some have contributed to the displacement of indigenous peoples from their own lands and from their traditional livelihood activities.

We know that the structural adjustment policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund did not only push for cutting back the government budgets for health and education but also pushed for further liberalization, deregulation and privatization of

basic social services. We also know that many of the World Trade Organization Agreements like the TRIPS Agreement mentioned in their report, the Agreement on Agriculture, the General Agreement on Services, among others, have brought about more negative than positive impacts to indigenous peoples.

The dominant development model perpetuated by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the WB and the IMF, regional banks like the ADB, IADB, AfDB, by the World Bank, the WTO, and even by the UN is one of the key problems of indigenous peoples. The dominance of this model has severely minimized the chances of strengthening our indigenous economic systems, natural resource management systems, and even the values, cultures and worldviews that underpin them. The predominance of western systems of health in the work of the WHO is also problematic, particularly as this organization is addressing issues of sustainable development and poverty.

We strongly urge that evaluations or reviews of the various programmes, policies and projects of the UN and other related bodies be undertaken with regard to the actual impacts on Indigenous Peoples. Policies which impact on Indigenous Peoples, like the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPS) or the Water and Forest Policies of the World Bank, and the WTO Agreements should be included in these examinations. The Permanent Forum can ask the specific UN bodies to become lead organizations in doing reviews based on thematic areas. These UN bodies should also take care of the expenses which will be entailed in doing these reviews. These review processes, however, should ensure that indigenous peoples participate at all stages as members of the review teams, and should take place in close and meaningful partnership with Indigenous Peoples.

We cite various examples of recommendations the Permanent Forum can make to various agencies, to examine the **actual impact on Indigenous Peoples and their communities**, whether negative or positive, of UN policies, programs and agency mandates under appropriate themes:

- The UNDP in coordination with the World Bank and the Commission on Social Development could lead a review in economic and social development;
- UNESCO could lead a review in education and culture;
- UNEP, with the Commission on Sustainable Development, with the active participation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the FAO, could coordinate a review of the actual impact of UN Policies and programmes on Indigenous communities under the theme of sustainable development;
- The WHO and PAHO could coordinate the review under the theme of health;
- UNIFEM and the Division on the Advancement of Women, could coordinate a review of gender;
- UNICEF could be asked to review the impacts of UN policies and programs on Indigenous communities on the theme of children;
- The UNHCR could examine the impacts of UN policies and Programmes under the theme of internal displacement and refugees;

We further recommend that the various UN agencies and bodies prepare more comprehensive reports in the next PF sessions that would include the results of the reviews if undertaken. This could also include results of earlier reviews or evaluations done with specific stress on the best and worst practices provide lessons and experience for future planning.

Mr. Chairman, we also draw attention to new models of global initiative like the Global Fund For AIDS, TB and malaria, which are quasi-governmental in character, have corporate funding and limited accountability to civil society or governments. In so far as corporate accountability is concerned the Permanent Forum might recommend guidelines or protocols with regard to Indigenous Peoples. Many conferences and meetings on this issue have been organized by the UN or by indigenous peoples themselves. Recommendations from these meetings can be synthesized to provide inputs for the guidelines.

Finally, it is recommended that more support be given by the UN system to strengthening the sustainable development practices and economic and social systems of indigenous peoples. This support can come not only in the form of funds but also in the form of policy and legal reforms on the national and international levels. Technical assistance to strengthen and replicate these systems can be provided by the UN. Indigenous experts should be tapped for these technical assistance programs.

Radical shifts in development thinking and policies are needed for indigenous peoples' models to be accommodated and recognized as sustainable and viable. This remains to be the biggest challenge for the UN, the WB-IMF and the WTO.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman