

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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ADDRESS TO THE OPENING OF FIFTH SESSION OF THE PERMANENT
FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

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Vice - President of the General Assembly,
President of the Economic and Social Council,
Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,
Distinguished observers from Member States, Indigenous Peoples' Organizations
and Nations, the Inter-Governmental system, non-governmental organizations,
the academia and the media, indigenous sisters and brothers,

Good afternoon and welcome back to the continuation of the Opening Session of
the Fifth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Let me now turn to the main theme of the session. *"Millennium Development Goals
and indigenous peoples: Redefining the Millennium Development Goals"*, addressing
Goals 3 to 8.

As you are all aware, nearly five years have passed since world leaders adopted
the Millennium Declaration, and the MDGs as part of their commitment to
eradicate poverty and promote human rights, democracy, and respect for nature.

This session will focus on Goals 3 – 8 which are: Promote gender equality and empower women; Reduce child mortality; Improve maternal health; Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; Ensure environmental sustainability; and Develop a global partnership for development.

Indigenous peoples would like to achieve the MDGs however; I am deeply concerned that the MDGs process does not take into account indigenous peoples' situations and participation. For example, in the Millennium Development Goals Country Reports indigenous peoples are often invisible, hidden under the general national averages which do not reflect the differentiated realities for specific groups. If the MDGs are met, there is no doubt that some effects will trickle down to some of the world's 370 million indigenous peoples, the majority of whom live in poverty.

Indigenous peoples have raised concerns about the MDGs so I will highlight some of these.

One concern is about the way poverty is defined, and poverty indicators in the MDGs. Poverty is generally defined in terms of income and consumption and is constructed around cash incomes and food expenditures within a market and cash-based economic setting. These are parameters which do not adequately reflect the realities of many indigenous peoples. Important non-income indicators of poverty include the lack of voice or power in political and bureaucratic systems, the non-recognition of the collective rights of indigenous peoples, their removal from ancestral lands, and their lack of access to basic infrastructure and social services, quality of environment, quality of social capital, among others. It has to be noted, though, that even with conventional

measurements on poverty we can see the highly disproportional percentage of indigenous peoples among those who are extremely poor.

While poverty is MDG Goal 1 and it will not be dealt with in this session, it is important to note that poverty is intricately related to the other goals so we cannot really avoid but refer to it when we talk of goals 3-8.

The World Bank, undertook a study in 5 countries in Latin America (Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico) to see whether poverty has been alleviated after the First Decade of the World's Indigenous People. (1994-2004). Their study concluded that incidence of poverty remains severe and deep among indigenous peoples. Few gains were made in income poverty reduction during this period in spite of the passage of constitutional provisions and laws recognizing indigenous peoples' rights. The indigenous poverty gap is deeper and shrank more slowly in the 1990s and indigenous women and children continue to have less access to health services. Poverty among indigenous peoples in Ecuador is about 87 percent and reaches 96 percent in the rural highlands. In Bolivia and Guatemala, more than half of the population are poor but almost three quarters of the indigenous population are poor. (Patrinos, 2004). These findings are similar to those of a UNICEF Study in 2003 which says 87% of indigenous peoples in Guatemala are poor compared to 54% of the non-indigenous population; in Mexico, 80% of indigenous peoples are poor compared to 18% from the non-indigenous groups.

Another interesting study which was presented at the "Conference on Indigenous Peoples and Poverty" held a few days ago, was one done in India. This made a comparison between the human development index (HDI) of

Scheduled Tribes, and HDI for All-India. A difference of 30 percent was established with the Scheduled Tribes found in the low-human development category comparable to the HDI of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa whereas the All-India HDI is in the middle-development category. This study showed that the infant mortality for Southern Orissa is 125 which is slightly higher than the average for Sub-Saharan Africa. Only 6 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa had higher rates.

The Strategic Framework on Indigenous Peoples of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) says that poverty maps in several countries show a high correlation between ethnicity and the rates of poverty.

The MDGs refer to development as a means for eradicating poverty. The term “development” is something burdened with a negative connotation for indigenous peoples even if this is called “sustainable,” because their histories are replete with traumatic experiences with development projects, policies and programs. In fact, mainstream development is often regarded as one of the root causes of their problems. If the MDGs reinforce this paradigm instead of challenging it there is little hope that the MDGs can really bring positive changes for indigenous peoples.

Thus, it is important to frame the MDGs as a human rights-based agenda. For indigenous peoples it is difficult to talk about development without talking about basic rights to lands and resources, culture and identity, and self-determination. Last year when we dealt with MDG goals 1 and 2, we talked of poverty in relation to the non-recognition of our rights to our lands, territories

and resources. Goal 2 on education allowed us to look how the right to education of indigenous children is being promoted.

For this session if we deal with gender-related goals (Goals 3 and 5) and we look at this in the context of how women's rights as recognized in CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action are being achieved. If we talk of health goals, this has to be seen in terms of how the right to health is being realized. If we talk of reducing child mortality we frame this in the context of the rights of the child and so on and so forth. I have to stress that there is no way that the MDGs can be achieved for indigenous peoples if this is not linked with how governments are complying with their obligations to international human rights law.

Another concern is the compartmentalized approach of the eight specific Millennium Development Goals. This is not in accordance with indigenous peoples' more holistic view of development and does not capture their priorities, for example, with regard to rights to lands, territories and resources. This is still related my earlier point. During the indigenous peoples' caucus over the weekend, an indigenous woman raised her concern that only three hours are devoted to the issue of human rights. My response was that you should not only focus your interventions on human rights under this item, because the MDGs which we will be discussing are all related to our basic human rights.

The invisibility of indigenous peoples in the MDG reports, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and even in Common Country Assessment and UNDAF Documents, has also been highlighted in several studies. The ILO did an ethnic audit of PRSPs of 14 countries with indigenous peoples and yet that there is hardly any reference to indigenous peoples. One of its conclusions is that the

serious lack of reliable up to date statistics and disaggregated data is a major factor in the disjuncture between poverty diagnostics and poverty reduction strategies. The Forum's Secretariat analysed 20 MDG reports and observed that 80% of these do not have sufficient references to indigenous peoples.

Another concern is the way MDGs are used to also address the situation of indigenous peoples in the developed countries. Usually MDGs are only discussed in relation to indigenous peoples in the developing countries. During the International Expert Workshop on Indigenous Peoples, MDGs, Participation and Good Governance in January, it was pointed out that the achievement of all the goals are also applicable to indigenous peoples in the rich countries. So there has to be a discussion here in the Session on how this could be done. What are the statistics on indigenous peoples in developed countries which should be used to influence this approach?

It is also in this workshop that the five objectives of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People should be used as guiding principles for addressing the issues of Millennium Development Goals, indigenous peoples and good governance.

During the next two weeks, I hope that the Forum will adopt strong recommendations as to how to improve the system of implementing the MDGs so that indigenous peoples will benefit from these. Hence, the involvement of indigenous peoples in the monitoring and implementation of the MDG processes will also be crucial.

Dear Colleagues,

During this session of the Forum we need to hold serious dialogues in order to find ways to achieve the MDGs. I feel there will be rich discussion about the way indigenous peoples perceive the MDGs. One of the concerns that will be raised in this session is HIV/AIDS. This illness is not only killing people but also destroying our family structures and our sense of community. In many countries, the stigma surrounding the disease remains potent so that our brothers and sisters living with HIV/AIDS are being shunned by close relatives and friends. Too often, orphaned children left behind by parents who have died from AIDS have to fend for themselves on the streets because they too are shunned by close relatives. As indigenous peoples, we must move to stamp out discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS because they are our brothers and sisters, members of our families and our communities.

We must together work for a world where indigenous peoples would have the right to grow old, have the right to live and die in their restored lands and territories, and where our children will be able to imagine a future with dignity and rights.

THANK YOU.