

[16 May 2006, PM, Item 3, #53, delivered by Mr. Sam Johnston]

**Statement to the UN Permanent Forum
5th Session
by
United Nations University**

16 May 2006

Madame Chair,

The United Nations University (UNU) is an official part of the UN. UNU's mandate is to provide research and training on emerging issues for the UN system. We aim to provide policy relevant information and analysis in a neutral and impartial manner. As an official part of the UN we provide a unique bridge between the academic community and the workings of UN processes. The Headquarters of UNU is based in Japan. UNU has centres in thirteen different countries around the world.

An important focus for our work relates to indigenous and local communities. An area of strong interest for the UNU is the work of the Permanent Forum.

We have been working on number of specific initiatives that are of relevance to the work of the Forum. This includes work on Traditional Knowledge registries and support the work of Call of the Earth for example. One initiative that we would like to bring to the Forum's attention at this moment is a project to explore the feasibility of establishing a UNU research centre on traditional knowledge.

Key aims of the UNU TK Centre would be to provide international leadership and a focal point for promoting research, training and capacity building on issues regarding the retention, maintenance and promotion of TK. Such a centre could support and strengthen research in TK, work on practical ways to address the threats to TK and provide an additional platform for indigenous people to provide their views to UN processes such as this Forum, WIPO or the CBD.

We have undertaken some preliminary work on establishing a centre similar in size to other Research and Training Centres of the UNU. UNU Centres typically consist of a small core team of around ten academics, run a PhD and post-doctorial fellowship programme and have close links with relevant local academic institutions.

Preliminary investigations conclude that:

- there is wide-spread support for the idea;
- establishing a centre on TK is timely and feasible; and
- a UNU Research Centre could make a constructive contribution on this topic.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the support and interest from all those who have contributed to our preparatory work on this so far. I would particularly like to thank The Christensen Fund for their intellectual and financial support.

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In December 2005 the Council of UNU (our governing body) considered the results of this preliminary investigation. The UNU Council concluded that there were sufficient reasons, interest and support for a UNU initiative on TK. The Council therefore requested the Rector to carry on working on this initiative.

In February 2006 we invited a range of key stakeholders, including your Secretariat and indigenous peoples, to provide their views about the mandate, structure and location of a TK Centre. In order to structure these comments we prepared a background document on these topics. The background report outlines the range of activities and topics that UNU could make a contribution on, such as:

- Medicine and health;
- Access to genetic resources, benefit sharing and intellectual property;
- Science: options for connecting TK and ‘western science’ and its application to development and conservation; and
- Agriculture, forests, plant genetic resources.

An open invitation to comment on the initiative is available on our website (www.ias.unu.edu) in English and Spanish. We would welcome comments. I will be available after this session if anyone would like further information about this initiative.

Thank you.