



Guatemala

Check against delivery

SECOND SESSION OF THE PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR

Gert Rosenthal
Permanent Representative

New York, May 21, 2003

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Delegates and other participants:

My delegation is taking the floor in order to express our satisfaction at the fact that, through this, its second session, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has become consolidated.

It is most gratifying for us that our distinguished compatriot, Ms. Otilia Lux de Coti, is one of the members of this body.

We also welcome the clear tendency that appears to exist towards the institutionalization of what is still an incipient effort to place the identity and the rights of indigenous populations on the agenda of the United Nations.

We sincerely hope that this endeavor will be strengthened and promote the well-being of populations that hitherto have figured among the most marginalized in the world. To that end we must, first, vitalize and support the Forum itself, whose novel composition offers an interesting combination of experience, wisdom and diversity. In the second place, we shall have to provide the secretariat with greater resources. Thirdly, we shall need to refine the mechanisms connecting the Forum and the very large number of non-governmental interlocutors that are in attendance here and, happily, turn these meetings into highly participatory events.

Our particular interest in this Forum derives from the fact that over half the population of our country is made up of indigenous peoples, peoples who have been subjected to outrageous discrimination and repression for centuries. The relevant public policy in Guatemala is now governed by the Peace Agreements concluded towards the end of 1996 and, particularly, by one of them, namely the Agreement on the Identity and Rights of the Mayan, Garifuna and Xinca Peoples, within the unity of the nation.

Among the measures taken these last few years in that context mention may be made of the Law Against Discrimination and the Law on the Recognition and the Use of Indigenous Languages. Other actions in the same field are the Decrees that created the Defense of Protected Indigenous Areas and Unlimited Access to the Archeological Sites deemed to be Sacred Places for the Mayas. Another measure that may be noted is the establishment of the Commission against Racism and Discrimination against the Indigenous Peoples of Guatemala. This body is presided over, with full autonomy, by Mr. Ricardo Cajas Mejia, a member of our delegation.

With your permission, Mr. Chairman, I would now like to assign the remainder of the time allotted to us to Mr. Cajas Mejia, in order that he may continue our intervention.