

**First Session Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
New York 13th to 24th May 2002.**

Item 5 General statements.

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Mr. Chairman, may I take this opportunity to congratulate you all for your appointments as Permanent Forum Experts and wish you all best of luck in the struggle, which has still to continue. While we welcome the first session of the Permanent forum, we are also reminded that there is a big challenge ahead of us, in order to keep the spirit going and have our rights recognized, we need concrete action. It is our hope that the Permanent forum can define specific mechanism in making the Government and the United Nations family adopt the draft declaration which has dragged for a long time.

Mr. Chairman I am privileged today to be able to make this intervention with a main focus on Africa Indigenous Women. Indigenous Women of Africa have remained the poorest, the most marginalized and vulnerable in all developing countries in Africa. They encounter double discrimination from the main stream populations and from their own whom they have given birth to, feed and shelter. They are victims of violence, poor health and the less educated. The problem of HIV/AIDS is a great problem facing humanity and Indigenous Women have not been left out. We need awareness creation on this problem otherwise we will loose many and loosing them means loosing indigenous knowledge which they are the keepers and custodian, there will be no one to pass it to the next generation.

Lack of participation, access to information and funding are just but a few of the problems that are setback for their advancement. For the past ten years, there has been many processes starting from the environment and development, sustainable development, health, education, culture and language and Globalization all in the name of development.

These processes have in record that all should participate effectively. Unfortunately Mr. Chairman, it has not been the case with Indigenous Peoples of Africa and worst of it with the Women. This has been caused by lack of funding, as most funding organizations have no interest in African indigenous issues. We however recognize the support and help that we have had by World Council of Churches, International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs, Netherlands Center for Indigenous Peoples and the Office of the high Commissioner on Human Rights just to name a few, for the support on especially the participation of African Indigenous Women in different forums and training that have certainly empowered them in a way or another.

We call upon the donors and governments to contribute to the Voluntary fund which is a fund that help different indigenous peoples in different activities. We also hope that the United Nations will take keen interest in reviewing the budget for the Permanent Forum

to enable the secretariat to be set and facilitate the Experts work effectively in their constituencies. We need to have voices from the communities, their issues should be brought forward and recommendations presented to the Permanent Forum. Without this it will be almost impossible to have the work of the Forum succeed.

The Permanent Forum should take action on trying to have ways of stopping the violence and the struggle for their lands, natural resources for Indigenous Peoples world wide and Mr. Chairman a recognition for Indigenous Women as key players at all levels in the society is very crucial in this millennium for the advancement of all Indigenous Peoples. They should not be discriminated, isolated from all activities of Indigenous Peoples, they should be incorporated in policy and decision making. There is a saying from my country, which says *if you educate a man you are educating an individual but if you educate a woman you are educating a Nation.*

Thank You Mr. Chairman