

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES CAUCUS OF THE GREATER CARIBBEAN (IPCGC)

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Sixth Session - Special theme: "Territories, lands and natural resources"

IPCGC Intervention: Joboshirima Lokono Arawak Community; Caney Quinto Mundo; Presencia Taina; KuKarey Spiritual Circle; United Confederation of Taino People (UCTP)

Monday, 17 May - Item 7: Urban Indigenous Peoples and Migration

Madam Chair, and distinguished delegates, we welcome this opportunity to address the plenary on Agenda Item 7 - Urban Indigenous Peoples and Migration.

The Indigenous Peoples Caucus of the Greater Caribbean[1] welcomes the reports submitted to the sixth session by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (HABITAT) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) among others. However, it is of great concern to us that these reports - like so many others submitted here - continue to ignore the unique situation of indigenous Caribbean islanders and our historic and present urban and migratory realities. Indeed, it is well-documented that our ancestral homelands extended throughout circum-Caribbean region even into parts of mainland North and South America. It is also well-documented that we, the descendants of our ancestors continue to exist in our ancestral territories and yet UN agencies mandated to assist Indigenous Peoples of "Latin America and the Caribbean" continue to focus resources only on the mainland.

This lack of attention to our well-being is not only discriminatory but in violation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. It is also contrary to reports and recommendations made by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which state that "all appropriate means must be taken to combat and eliminate" discrimination against indigenous and tribal peoples.

With this in mind, on the issue of urban indigenous peoples, we (IPCGC) recommend that the Permanent Forum:

1) Recommend to States and United Nations agencies that any follow-up on the issue of urban indigenous peoples include Caribbean Indigenous Peoples. This follow-up should also include without discrimination, the full and effective participation of Caribbean Indigenous Peoples who reside in non-self governing territories such as the Taíno People of the "free associated state of Puerto Rico." Adequate funding should be provided for their inclusion.

We would further recommend that the special situation of Caribbean Indigenous Peoples who reside outside their traditional homelands also be addressed in relevant follow-up mechanisms on this agenda item.

2) Recommend to States and United Nations agencies that best practices such as the "Multi-Ethnic Center" in Estado Bolívar in Venezuela and the "Amerindian Hostels" in Guyana be highlighted as positive initiatives with regard to the situation of urban indigenous peoples and migration. These initiatives provide services to indigenous peoples in the urban context by providing accommodation opportunities, some educational services, meals etc.

Further, while these projects should be improved to include increased medical facilities, and expanded educational and vocational services, these programs could provide a base model for other countries.

On the issue of migration, we (IPCGC) recommend that the Permanent Forum:

1) Support calls for a 2nd International Border Security Summit that will focus on the human rights of indigenous peoples divided by international borders. This Summit should include Caribbean Indigenous Peoples, including those in non-self governing territories such as the Taíno People of Puerto Rico.

2) Call upon States, and inter-governmental initiatives such as CARICOM and the Association of Caribbean States to create adequate mechanisms in conjunction with the Indigenous Peoples of the Greater Caribbean to facilitate uninterrupted communications and border crossings between the Arawak, Carib, and Warao Peoples of Venezuela, Guyana, and Suriname, the Taíno People of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, as well as the Carib Peoples of Dominica and Trinidad – all of whom share common ancestral heritage.[2]

Madam Chair, and distinguished delegates, we say bo'matum (thank you) for your time and consideration.

Statement Presented by: Mildred Gandia Reyes, UCTP

[1] Following an organizational structure similar to the Association of Caribbean States, the "Greater Caribbean" is defined here as an area of cooperation in recognition of common ancestral heritages and common geographic spaces shared by the Indigenous Peoples of the region.

[2] CARICOM has begun to institute a "Common Passport" for the full member states of the Caribbean Community in order to make intra-regional and international travel easier for their citizens. During the July 2006 CARICOM Summit, an agreement was reached on measures to ensure hassle-free movement for visitors to the 2007 Cricket World Cup. Travelers amongst the nine host countries and Dominica were able to use a single CARICOM visa between January 15, 2007 and May 15, 2007. No special provisions for Indigenous Peoples have been discussed with the context of the common passport or visa.