

World Bank (Mr. Alfredo Sfeir-Younis)

Madam Chairperson,

The Bank's policy towards indigenous peoples dates back to 1982 and it was designed to consider the needs of relatively isolated tribal groups affected by development projects. It focussed on the protection of land rights and the provision of health services, particularly in relation to forest-dwelling indigenous peoples in lowland South America.

In 1991, we revised the policy and extended the definition of indigenous peoples to ensure that the development process fosters full respect for all of them and their dignity, human rights and cultural uniqueness.

Since, 150 Bank-financed projects have been identified as affecting indigenous peoples. Though in the past, many of these investments were in the infrastructure and energy sectors, today an increasing number are in education, health, community development, agriculture, natural resources management and land tenure security.

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However, compliance faced some important constraints. Thus, in an attempt to ensure greater compliance, in 1998, we initiated another review process. We organized a series of in-country and regional consultations, including discussions with some indigenous organizations, international organizations, government representatives, NGOs and academic experts.

Among the issues taken up in this on-going process were:

- The policy in relation to poverty alleviation, sustainable development and participation;
- The process for identifying beneficiaries;
- The steps needed to ensure a meaningful consultation and informed participation of indigenous peoples;

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- The legal measures to protect indigenous peoples lands, waters and natural resources; and
- The recognition and protection of indigenous peoples' knowledge and culture; and

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Madam Chairperson

We have pursued several country and regional initiatives to implement the policy and you will find examples in our written statement.

We know that the policy is not the answer to all the problems. But, we see it as a means to better design projects and bring new instruments to reflect indigenous peoples' developmental goals and aspirations.

These difficult challenges will only be overcome if we form a strong alliance of interest together.

Final Thoughts

In closing, I would like to state that indigenous peoples have historically been the poorest and most excluded populations in many parts of the world. They have experienced significant discrimination on property, languages, culture and citizenship, and suffered from the lack of access to essential services and satisfying living conditions.

I strongly believe that the aims and goals of sustainable development will never be achieved if societies are not culturally sustainable.

Cultural sustainability is at the roots of economic and social progress and it provides the identity, knowledge and spiritual dimensions of sustainability.

And we must ensure that the development process facilitated by the Bank takes into consideration the cultural aspects of indigenous societies. To ignore indigenous cultures is like burning the library

before reading the books. It will become a major block to the real evolution in our societies.

I recently went to mountains of Guatemala and spent some time with ten Maya Priests in their altars, and discussed their vision of the future. Also, not long ago, I discussed the same issues with some of my Mapuche friends in Chile. And I have done so with some Coyas, Incas and Cunas. The theme was the same: it is imperative that we all protect and develop the fundamental value systems of indigenous peoples.

We often reach a singular conclusion: at this juncture in world history there is a major disconnect between what we call a modern society and fundamental notions of life on Earth as portrayed in the cosmovision of indigenous peoples.

We must eliminate this disconnect, and this would require concerted actions to address today's challenges of universal inclusion. Whether you broach it from the human rights angle, or from the social and political angle, or from the economic and financial angle, the fundamental objective is the same: indigenous cultures, indigenous societies, and indigenous knowledge are central to universal inclusion.

Your support is central to the success of our mission.

Thank you very much.

Thank you Madam Chairperson,

It is an honor for me to speak today. And I would like to pay my personal respect to the presence and authority of the many elders and chiefs here today.

Let me start by saying

- that we deeply care about the issues and concerns of indigenous peoples; and
- that we are prepared to address many of the issues discussed during this week, including access to land, improve the welfare of the indigenous population, protect the environment; address some of the most acute equity and distribution related issues and combat acute poverty.

On issues of human rights, you are fully aware of the limitations we face in relation to playing an advocacy role in this field. This is simply not in our mandate.

But, we know the intimate relation between economic policy and the right to development, with poverty eradication as fundamental to the attainment of those rights.

To live in poverty is a fundamental violation of all rights.

This is why it is essential to address three key dimensions:

- Firstly, that human, financial and other resources are limited and important trade offs will have to be settled to provide, for example, health, education, sanitation, and many other human services for all. This will necessitate to pass through effective socio-economic planning and implementation.
- Secondly, that even the ratification of rights does not ensure their materialization. Thus, our societies need to enhance their ability to

materialize existing rights. This is where the Bank can make an important contribution, for example, in strengthening justice systems, enhancing participation and social inclusion, and establishing the necessary mechanisms to create access to the most productive assets of societies.

- Finally, mainstreaming the concerns already expressed into macroeconomic policy making is not a simple task. For this to happen, we must significantly change existing value systems so our societies become equitable, and indigenous peoples and their cultures, find the institutional and political space to develop and flourish.

Let me say just a few words on the concerns you have expressed about the land.

First, and foremost, that we are fully aware of the multiple roles that land plays in the lives of indigenous peoples.

- land is not just a factor of production.
- access to land is more than just a means for the accumulation of wealth.
- a very sacred, spiritual and unique relationship exists between the land and the people.
- addressing land access, use and management must be part of the whole cosmovision defining the future of indigenous societies.

Second, we see the inevitable challenge of integrating the elements of that cosmovision into global, national, regional and local policy making. This will determine the fate of indigenous societies. This is not just an integration of concepts and processes, but of fundamental values and a holistic understanding of how we need to shape our future in this planet.

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