

Seventh session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Geneva, 11-15 July 2014

Provisional Agenda Item 7: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Statement by Mr. Shankar Limbu

on behalf of the

Board of Trustees of the

United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples

I thank you for giving me this opportunity to take the floor to address the seventh session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples. I would like to bring to your attention that as of last year, the name of the Fund changed from 'Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations' to 'Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples'. This symbolic but highly significant move was endorsed by the General Assembly last December and better reflects the status and rights of those who benefit from our work.

I would also like to seize this opportunity to welcome the twenty (20) beneficiaries of the Fund for being present with us during this session.

The UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples was established in 1985 as a response to the needs of Indigenous Peoples to participate and self-represent their nations and organizations in the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations. As you well know, enabling participation of Indigenous Peoples in meetings that directly affect their lives is essential to ensuring that the decisions that are made carry legitimacy and yield positive outcomes. For example, the Fund's support has helped Indigenous Peoples claim their rightful seat when the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was drafted, and to speak up on the implementation of this Declaration since its adoption in 2007.

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Currently, the Fund has a mandate to assist representatives of Indigenous organizations and communities to participate in the sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Human Rights Council, the Universal Periodic Review mechanism, and the human rights treaty bodies.

To ensure that Indigenous Peoples are able, in their own voices, to raise their concerns and propose solutions in UN deliberations, we must make certain that Indigenous Peoples have the means to travel from their often poor and remote communities. Without the financial support of the Fund, many Indigenous Peoples would face severe challenges in their ability to participate in these important international human rights processes.

In addition to providing financial support to enable the participation of Indigenous Peoples in UN meetings, the Fund also employs resources to build the capacity of Indigenous Peoples to make them truly effective participants in those meetings. In cooperation with NGO partners, the Fund provides assistance to Indigenous Peoples' representatives in targeting their advocacy, making constructive interventions tailored to each UN event, and contributing to the implementation of the recommendations made by human rights mechanisms and the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the national level. The Fund currently supports human rights training for Indigenous Peoples' representatives, including during this session of the Mechanism, organized in partnership with DoCip. I would invite you all to participate in the training session on the Human Rights Council, which will take place tomorrow, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., at room XXIII.

Let me now give you an update of the activities of the Board. In 2013, a total of sixty-six (66) travel grants were awarded to representatives of Indigenous communities and organizations to participate in the following sessions: the Permanent Forum, the Expert Mechanism, the Human Rights Council, the UPR Working Group, as well the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Committee on the Rights of

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Persons with Disabilities. Unfortunately, the Fund could not fully meet the demand for support in light of the very limited resources available.

I am mostly happy to report the growing interest of Indigenous Peoples' representatives to participate in the sessions of the human rights mechanisms. In total, 25 beneficiaries attended the sessions of those mechanisms in 2013. The extension of the mandate of the Fund to cover the sessions of the human rights mechanisms has allowed Indigenous Peoples to engage actively to bring Indigenous Peoples' issues and perspectives into the work of human rights bodies. Our work has already helped to heighten the profile of Indigenous Peoples' issues in the work and findings of these bodies. The insights and information that the grantees have brought to the discussions have been very much welcomed by members of the treaty bodies and others concerned.

For 2014, the Board of Trustees has so far selected fifty-seven (57) indigenous representatives to attend the sessions of the Permanent Forum, the Expert Mechanism, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Furthermore, the Board set a budget to allow Indigenous Peoples' representatives – to be selected at the next two inter-sessional meetings in August and November 2014 – to attend the sessions of the Human Rights Council, UPR and treaty bodies that will take place between September 2014 and March 2015.

I would also like to use this opportunity to announce that the Fund currently has an open call for applications that includes participation of Indigenous Peoples' representatives in the 27th session of the Human Rights Council, the 20th session of the UPR Working Group and the sessions of the treaty bodies taking place between September and December 2014. I would strongly encourage Indigenous Peoples who meet the admissibility criteria to apply.

Mister Chair, Excellency (ies), Ladies and Gentlemen, in 2012, the mandate of the Fund was expanded to include support for Indigenous Peoples to participate in the high-level plenary meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, to be known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. I am happy to report that the Fund received

contributions, including earmarked funding, from Denmark, Norway, New Zealand and Sweden. In fulfilling its mandate, the Fund already supported the participation of 21 Indigenous Peoples' representatives in the interactive hearing envisaged in the modalities resolution and that took place in New York on 17 and 18 June 2014. The Fund is now preparing to support the participation of 84 Indigenous Peoples' representatives in the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. Additional information is available on the website of the Fund.

As you know, the work of the Fund is supported by means of voluntary contributions. Governments, non-governmental organizations and other private or public entities can contribute to the Fund. In this regard, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, I would like to express our deepest gratitude and appreciation to the governments of Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Chile, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, the Holy See, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Spain, Sweden and Turkey for their generous contributions to the Voluntary Fund in 2013-2014.

In order to bolster this on-going work, it is imperative that the Fund receives increasing support by governments and other donors. Although the level of contributions received in 2013-14 has increased in comparison to the previous years, the uncertainty about future contributions continues to impact the delivery of our mandate. In order to respond to increasing demands and to operate and fulfil its mandate in a satisfactory manner, it is imperative that the Fund receives sustained and increasing support from governments and other donors.

I would like to conclude by saying that in order to successfully advance the rights of Indigenous Peoples we must ensure the continued participation of those most directly affected. The Fund plays an essential role in that sense. 2015 represents the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Fund, which calls for a celebration of the Fund's history and positive impact upon UN processes to advance the promotion and protection of indigenous human rights. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I would like to appeal all Governments to consider supporting the very important work of the Fund.

I thank you.