

STATEMENT TO THE 22ND WORKING GROUP (19TH – 23RD JULY, 2004) ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION.

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The Chairman of the 22nd Session of the Working Group,
Delegates of Indigenous Organisations,
Distinguished personalities, Ladies and Gentlemen:

- Accept greetings from the Mbororo Pastoralists of Cameroon. We are once again thanking the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations for making our participation possible. Briefly I will present to you the situation of Mbororo indigenous pastoralists in Cameroon and conflict resolution.

Mbororo pastoralists are indigenous people who mostly depend on extensive cattle herding for their livelihood. In response to degrading pastures, most of them are to some extent nomadic. For this reason, they are often regarded as 'backward'. In Cameroon, the Mbororo number about 1 million people. Like any other indigenous people around the world, the Mbororo pastoralists' traditional ways of life are based on the natural environment. Thus, any other form of activity on their pastureland poses a threat to their survival. As marginalised people, they have limited form representation in decision-making structures making it difficult for their problems to be heard. Their cultural and economic survival is threatened by population expansion, environmental degradation and ecologically and socially unsound development policies. Modern ranching projects, natural reserves, unclear land tenure systems are major threats to their survival. Of crucial significance is the fact that their pasturelands do not belong to them but are communal or state owned. Land is usually taken over by powerful individuals or interest groups.

- The theme of this year 'Indigenous People and Conflict resolution' is vital for both the Mbororo pastoralists as well as Mboscuda. Most often, conflict is looked upon negatively as it results to tension, disagreements, fighting, war, oppression, chaos just to name a few, but when we view conflict positively the resultant effects will be development, change, understanding, love etc. As a result of differences between the Mbororo and other ethnic groups in Cameroon, they always face social, economic, political, cultural and religious conflicts on a daily basis. Agro-pastoral conflicts predominate where their pasturelands are often invaded by farming neighbours like the case of Mambila who inhabit the borders of Cameroon with Nigeria and the Aghem people in Wum in the Northwest province of Cameroon. Pastoralists' people in these two regions have been evicted from their lands some have been killed while others moved to new sites that are not suitable for grazing. Powerful ranchers like Baba Ahmadou Danpullo in Ndawara, proprietor of Elba ranch is the greatest threat to Mbororo pastoralists in the Northwest province of Cameroon who seized about 7500ha of land. As a result of the fact that the land tenure law in Cameroon greatly favours the dominant farming population, the mbororo pastoralists are left in the hands of corrupt officials who only exploit them.

- The Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (**MBOSCUDA**) in an attempt to solve some of these conflicts set up seven Para-legal offices with trained personnel where Mbororo people facing agro-pastoral conflicts bring their complaints and are given some counselling on how to go about them. Most often, the victims are advised to go for amicable settlement. Amicable settlement if reached will go a long way to rehabilitate relationships and will reduce exploitation of the conflicting parties by corrupt government officials who fuel these conflicts for their personal gains. To guarantee this process **MBOSCUDA** employs a lawyer who follows up legal redress and ensures access to justice where amicable settlement cannot be reached. **MBOSCUDA** also has embarked on lobbying and advocacy where workshops and seminars are carried out bringing together government officials, traditional leaders, graziers and farmers. Causes and different ways of handling conflicts discussed, role-plays are used to present situations and possible solutions arrived at. Individual also lobby those they think can influence change.

Lastly, **MBOSCUDA**, in order to minimise some of the conflicts that come as a result of the misinterpretation of the Koran by non Mbororo Muslims who do so for their own interest has also employed an Islamic cleric whose duty is to sensitise the mbororo people on what Islam says in relation to conflicts, education, women, micro – credit and development in general.

• We would therefore like to put forward the following recommendations;

- The government of Cameroon to put in place an institutional legislative policy framework that creates an enabling environment for graziers and farmers where both parties are given chance to invest as well as own portion of the national lands.
- Develop a participatory approach in conflict resolution amongst graziers and farmers, which involves community leaders and government administrators.
- The government of Cameroon to create grazing reserves that would permit graziers to develop and carryout modern grazing techniques.
- The government of Cameroon to punish the perpetrators of Human Rights abuses according to established laws.
- The government of Cameroon to publish the report of the Jani Commission, which was set up by, the Minister of Justice to investigate crimes committed on the Mbororo pastoralists by the multi-millionaire rancher Baba Ahmadou Danpullo over the years. This commission of inquiry carried out its investigations in 2003.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is said that conflicts if not well handled will be devastating; therefore there is the need for us to re-focus and re-direct our organisations and energies as conflict managers rather than conflict entrepreneurs. We would like to urge the Council to encourage the Resident UN Mission bodies in Cameroon to establish permanent dialogue with indigenous organisations in the country. Permit me end this note by thanking all who are involved in the struggle for our rights and dignity.

Thank you for your attention.