

**BALLOTIRAL: An example of indigenous peoples
(Mbororo of Cameroon) in their own development**

Mr Chairman
Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak at this session and it is my pleasure to see and hear all of you. On behalf of MBOSCUDA I pledge our support for the UNWGIP, the Permanent Forum and the structures and policies put in place to protect and promote indigenous peoples around the world. I am Fadimatou Dahirou, Secretary General of the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA) of Cameroon in Central Africa. I speak as the representative of MBOSCUDA.

The Mbororo as indigenous peoples have the right to sustainable development. That is to say universal economic, social and cultural rights enshrined in international law and practice. The Constitution of Cameroon guarantees minorities the protection of their rights. MBOSCUDA is finding the best ways and means of promoting and advocating for these rights.

One of the several development projects initiated by MBOSCUDA is BALLOTIRAL (meaning working together). It is an innovative partnership of MBOSCUDA, Society for Initiatives in Rural Development and Environmental Protection (SIRDEP) and the UK-based international development NGO, Village Aid. The project involves running literacy circles, micro-credit programmes, saving schemes, health and education projects, civil and civic rights advocacy and training. The project involves 27 communities in the North West Province.

Using tested literacy models such as REFLECT, MBOSCUDA and its partners are able to engage the grassroots in their own development. They identify their problems; they prioritise and design solutions for them. As a result of training on civil rights for example, last year 700 Mbororo people obtained birth certificates enabling them to obtain computerised National Identity Cards, which are proof of their citizenship. 30 children were able to sit official examinations as a result of this programme. Four different schools were constructed with over 70% participation of indigenous communities.

Traditional Mbororo society offers very little space for women in public life or enterprise. The micro-credit scheme is aimed at giving women social, political and economic freedom. This helps them to create opportunities within their own families and communities for development.

BALLOTIRAL also encompasses a Para-Legal programme. Two workshops on land tenure were organised not long ago which brought together traditional and community leaders, local farmers, cattle herders and the local government authorities. The idea is to bring together all the stakeholders at the local level to identify land tenure problems and try and find consensual solutions to them while agreeing on implementing existing legislations and acceptable traditional conflict resolutions mechanisms. The initiative has been a resounding success.

MBOSCUDA has made many positive achievements. We were at the UN World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, and have been involved in the UNWGIP since 2000. It is not

a long time for many of you have been involved for well over 20 years but for the Mbororo of Cameroon this is remarkable achievement given our circumstances. We are also involved in other global networks such the African Indigenous Women's Organisation supported by the Netherlands Centre for Indigenous Affairs and ~~Tabbital~~ **Pulaaku**, a pan-African pastoralists network. It is our hope that all these international forums will move away from process-centred agendas to give priority to real issues that affect ordinary indigenous peoples out there. Though we have many positive things to celebrate about, we also face a lot of challenges and problems.

There is lack of capacity within MBOSCUA and I guess it is the same with other indigenous peoples organisation to cope with all the plethora of local and international forums they will wish to be involved. Funding is also a major problem. However, the oppression and persecution of indigenous peoples by rich and powerful land speculators remains our major concern. In Cameroon a powerful commercial cattle rancher has persecuted our people for well over 14 years. All attempts to get the authorities to stop this individual's exactions have fallen on deaf ears. As I speak, Mr Chairman, four of our colleagues are languishing in Bafoussam Central Prison for daring to oppose this individual's latest action. He has displaced our communities from their grazing lands without compensation, caused their arrests, torture, detention and imprisonment with impunity. The cases of gross violations of fundamental human rights highlighted by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture have not had any effect on the pattern or intensity of violations. We will place details of these cases on the information table and we will be pleased to speak to anyone who is interested in doing something about it.

Mr Chairman
Ladies and Gentlemen

We do understand that we are making our declarations in line with the major themes of this session and we have chosen a case of our participation in our own development but also in accordance with the major themes. May we specifically draw your attention to the above-mentioned case of human rights violations and to say that the State of Cameroon has failed to protect our people for over 14 years. We call on the solidarity and support of the representatives present here today to put an end to the persecution of our people. It is all well and good to come to these forums every year and speak but what matters to the people we represent is action and action now or it will be too late for some of our colleagues.

Mr Chairman
Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for your attention.

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