

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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CHAIRPERSON

ADDRESS TO THE OPENING OF SIXTH SESSION OF THE PERMANENT  
FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

New York, 14 May 2007

H.E. Ambassador Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, President of the General Assembly,  
H.E. Ambassador Dalius Čekuolis , President of the Economic and Social  
Council,

H.E. Ambassador Luis Alfonso de Alba, Chair of the Human Rights Council

Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,

Distinguished observers from Member States, Indigenous Peoples'  
Organizations, the Inter-Governmental system, non-governmental organizations,  
the academia and the media, indigenous sisters and brothers,

It gives me a great pleasure to welcome you and address you today at this sixth  
session of the Permanent Forum which has devoted its special theme to the  
"Territories, lands and natural resources".

- Let me first pay my respects to the Onondaga Nation and Peoples who are  
the original inhabitants of this land and to thank them for having us here  
again.

- Land, territories and related resource rights are of fundamental importance to indigenous peoples since they constitute the basis of their economic livelihood and are the sources of their spiritual, cultural and social identity. Land is the foundation for the lives and cultures of indigenous peoples all over the world. Without access to, and respect of their rights over their lands, territories and natural resources, indigenous peoples' distinct cultures, and the possibility of determining their own development and future, become eroded. It is therefore not a surprise that the right to land and natural resources is a key demand of the international indigenous peoples' movement and of indigenous peoples and organizations everywhere. It is also not a surprise that most local and national indigenous peoples' movements emerged from struggles against policies and actions which undermined and discriminated against their customary land tenure and resource management systems, which expropriated their lands, which extracted their resources without their consent and which led to their displacement from their territories.
- It is therefore proper for us to pay tribute to our ancestors and to thousands of indigenous activists and leaders who sacrificed their lives in defense of traditional lands and territories. Let us have one minute of silence to remember them and to thank them.

### **Highlights of the Session**

- Let me now give you some highlights of what is new and how this year's session is going to address the theme and mandated areas of the Forum.

- One new development is that the Forum has now an additional category of participants which is indigenous persons who are members of parliaments. Several indigenous parliamentarians from various countries are present with us today.
- Another new thing is that for this session, we have three Special Rapporteurs on human rights who will be speaking before us within the week.
- There are various reports that will feed into this session including the International Expert Group Meeting on the CBD international regime on access and benefit-sharing and the human rights of indigenous peoples and the report of the annual session of the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues, focusing on the theme "development with identity" and the IASG paper on lands, territories and resources. Many members of the IASG have submitted very interesting reports on how they have implemented the recommendations of the Forum. Some governments also have submitted reports.
- The Permanent Forum Experts also prepared technical papers on *"Indigenous Traditional Knowledge"*, on *"The impact of oil palm plantations and other monocrop plantations on indigenous peoples' land tenure and resource management systems and livelihoods"* and *"The Implementation of the Human Rights Mandate of the Permanent Forum"*. I urge you to spare some time to read these reports and comment on the conclusions and recommendations of these in your interventions.
- Before this session the Arctic and Asia indigenous peoples' regional caucuses held their own seminar-workshops on lands, territories and resources and the reports form part of this session's documents. You will also get the reports of the regional expert workshops on indigenous

peoples' indicators of well-being, poverty and sustainability which were held in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Other highlights of this session include;

- The participation of a 12-year old indigenous artist Rebang Dewan, a Chakma from the Chittagong Hills of Bangladesh who is the winner of the logo competition of the Permanent Forum and his design appears in the new folders and other publications.
- A half-day discussion on Urban Indigenous Peoples and Migration. While the majority of indigenous peoples worldwide still live in rural areas, they are increasingly migrating to urban areas, both voluntarily and involuntarily. The report of the *International Expert Meeting on Urban Indigenous Peoples and Migration*, held in Santiago end of March 2007 will feed into the discussion of this session. This meeting was co-organized by UN-HABITAT, ECLAC, OHCHR, SPFII, in cooperation with IOM following a recommendation of the Forum. The meeting was made possible with the funding by the Canadian Government.
- There will be half-day regional focus on Asia. Speakers include representatives of inter-governmental institutions and international financial institutions working in Asia (e.g. the Asian Development Bank), ILO, IFAD and a representative of the Asian indigenous peoples' caucus. The meeting will identify achievements and challenges in regards to indigenous peoples' issues in the Asian region.
- The discussion of human rights will take place with a dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on human rights and fundamental freedoms of

indigenous people, Mr Rodolfo Stavenhagen. Two other Special Rapporteurs of the Human Rights Council will also be present, namely the SR on violence against women (Mrs Yakin Erturk) and the SR on trafficking (Ms Sigma Huda).

Also, this year, the Permanent Forum will focus a central part of its session on the implementation of its recommendations of previous sessions, especially those it adopted regarding indigenous peoples and the MDGs, in 2005 and 2006. Various reports will feed into this evaluation such as those submitted by the UN system as well as a number of papers and desk reviews. I should also mention that a database, which is kept updated by the SPFII, on the implementation of recommendations of the 2006 session is posted on the SPFII website, [www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii)).

I now want to turn briefly to the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples from 2005 to 2015 which was adopted at the Fifty-Ninth Session of the General Assembly (Resolution 59/174) on 20 December 2004. Subsequently, the Programme of Action for the Second Decade was adopted at the Sixtieth Session of the General Assembly (Resolution 60/506) on 29 November 2005. The theme for the Programme of Action is *"Partnership for Action and Dignity"*. Of course, these resolutions are direct results of the lobbying work of indigenous peoples and the recommendations from the Permanent Forum and the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations.

These two resolutions reaffirmed "...that States should, in accordance with international law, take concerted positive steps to ensure respect for all human

rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples, on the basis of equality and non-discrimination, and recognizing the value and diversity of their distinctive identities, cultures and social organization.” These defined the goal of the Decade which is the further strengthening of international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous peoples through action-oriented programmes and projects, increased technical assistance and standard-setting activities.

One of the **major** issues for 2007 is the **UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** which was adopted by the Human Rights Council, the United Nations' main human rights authority, during its first session in June 2006. The Declaration is the result of many years of discussion and negotiation among the states members of the Human Rights Commission, with the active participation of representatives of the world's indigenous peoples.

As I stated in my address on International Human Rights Day in December last year, indigenous peoples were shocked and deeply disappointed at the decision of the General Assembly to defer the adoption in November last year. The Declaration stands as one of the most extensively discussed and negotiated texts in the history of the UN with the full participation of indigenous peoples, a process for which the international community should stand proud. This Declaration represents the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of indigenous peoples. Many still live under the most oppressive and marginalized conditions and yet they are also the ones who are providing solutions to serious world problems such as climate change and the erosion of biocultural diversity.



I am glad that H.E. Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, the President of the General Assembly, is with us today and I take this opportunity to humbly appeal to you to do everything possible to have the Declaration adopted before your term ends. I was made aware that there are amendments to the Declaration adopted by the Human Rights Council which may be brought before the General Assembly. I think that the only chance for the Declaration to be adopted is by ensuring that the HRC-adopted version will be the one which will be subjected for voting, not a text which mangles the Declaration beyond recognition. The fate of this Declaration is in your hands and the governments who are here in this hall today.

In closing, I would like to reiterate my thanks to my co-members of the Permanent Forum for their confidence in me to steer this year's session again and for being such good team players. I also would like to thank our Secretariat, who have been tirelessly working to prepare for this session and together with the Forum experts, to contribute in fulfilling the Forum's mandate and implementing some of its recommendations. The Forum members have engaged with various processes at the national, regional and international level to raise awareness on issues important for indigenous peoples. We are also trying hard to promote a human rights-based approach to development as well as facilitating indigenous peoples' participation in various processes which have impacts on them. However, the effective participation of indigenous peoples in designing and implementing policy remains as a key challenge.

I would also like to thank the representatives of indigenous peoples' organizations and nations, the members of the Inter-agency Support Group on

Indigenous Issues and the governments who, likewise, have done their share in helping implement the Permanent Forum's recommendations.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the indigenous peoples of the world who relentlessly pursue their struggles for their rights and dignity and their own development visions and priorities. Many of you have traveled far from home to participate in this Session. Let us all work together to make this session meaningful for you and your peoples.

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