

IPACC and Africa Caucus Statement on Militarization in Indigenous Territories in Africa

UNWGIP - 31 July - 4 August 2006

Distinguished Experts of the Working Group, distinguished members of the diplomatic community, indigenous brothers and sisters, ladies and gentlemen.

We wish to address in the general sense the continuing vulnerability of indigenous peoples in Africa during armed conflicts. According to the Ploughshares Monitor of 2006 (vol 27: 2), in the preceding year there were armed conflicts in 13 African countries, representing 41% of the world's armed conflicts.

We wish to elaborate on statements made by IPACC, its members and the African indigenous caucus to the Permanent Forum earlier this year.

Indigenous peoples are frequently the victims during times of armed conflict. In Rwanda in 1994, approximately one third of the Batwa people were killed during the 100 day genocide. The Batwa were on neither side of the armed conflict, they were caught in between. After the peace accords, Batwa remained disproportionately affected by imprisonment, loss of homes, poverty and displacement.

Frequently, indigenous territories include special ecological zones which become attractive for armed movements. In Rwanda, the Gishwati Forest became the base for rebel groups, and hence was destroyed the government forces. The Gishwati Forest was home to thousands of Batwa people, who permanently lost the natural resources which had sustained them for millennia.

We regularly see large scale poaching of wild animals by the military during armed conflicts and even in peace time. When the wildlife is destroyed, indigenous peoples are forced into the cities where they become beggars and prostitutes. When the wildlife is restored, indigenous peoples are usually told that this is now a nature reserve and they may not return.

For indigenous peoples in Africa, peace is not just the absence of war; it includes continuous secure access to our traditional natural resources, the full recognition of our identities, our languages and our citizenship, and the right to maintain our specific economic practices in our territories.

We cite some important concerns for further attention of the Working Group:

- We are submitting a report from West Africa on US military activities in the Central Sahara which are affecting domestic relations between nomads and central governments;
- We note our deep concern for the situation of indigenous nomadic peoples in Chad, Sudan, northern Uganda and Somalia;
- We note with extreme concern the slow response of the UN and the international community to the vulnerability of 'Pygmy' peoples in the Eastern DRC. We refer you to the Minority Rights Group report 'Erase the Board'. DRC is going through its national elections and yet most indigenous peoples still do not have identity cards and are treated as second class citizens;
- We note the increasing violence in northern Kenya and the urgent need for indigenous peoples to be active players in finding solutions to land and natural resources conflicts;
- We praise the government of Burundi for promoting the participation of indigenous peoples in the Parliament and Senate. We note with concern the continued instability in certain parts of the country;
- We note with joy the end of the armed conflict in Angola, but we remind the UN and African Union that indigenous! Xun and Khwe San peoples still need secure rights and to be recognize as full citizens of Angola with their specific indigenous identity;
- We note with concern the heavy handed approach to resolving disputes over territories and natural resources in the Niger Delta region;
- We remind the WGIP, that if African soldiers and national police stopped extorting bribes from vulnerable indigenous peoples, there would be more money in rural areas and the MDGs would be closer to being achieved than they are today.

We wish to draw your attention to the report from the Permanent Forum meeting of its concern for Africa's indigenous groups. The PF is "urging African Governments to ensure the full participation of indigenous peoples in the development of policies regarding implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, and, among other things, to invite representatives from indigenous peoples' organizations to participate in round-table dialogues, as a way to resolve conflict, while protecting indigenous peoples from armed conflict, particularly in the Sudan, the Great Lakes region, Niger Delta and Sahara regions." [Extract from ECOSOC report

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/hr4898.doc.htm>]

Recommendations

- We call on the office of High Commissioner for Human Rights to assist indigenous peoples in Africa in researching and reporting on human rights violations committed by armed forces and police;
- We ask the African Union and the UN to specifically monitor the vulnerability of nomadic peoples in arid areas, and forest-based indigenous peoples affected by armed conflicts in Africa;
- We call on the WGIP and the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous Peoples to investigate the situation of indigenous Pygmies in the Great Lakes Region, and in the Central and Eastern Sahara / Sahelian regions.