

**Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
13th-24th May**



Simba Maasai Outreach Organization. Kenya.

Bio-diversity and Maasai Sacred Sites

Mr. Chair, Sir, I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude towards the United Nations for incorporating the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues into its family.

Through the Permanent Forum, Indigenous societies from all over the World will have a channel through which they can express their feelings and views towards their own improvement and fellowship together while sharing experiences annually.

Mr. Chair, Sir, development as so called by the industrialized countries has brought about various effects and disadvantages for Indigenous people. In Kenya for example, the Maasai have been denied a chance to express and conduct their cultural events due to the formation of unfavorable laws that are governing the citizens of Kenya.

Most of our sacred sites have been designated as government reserves making them inaccessible for the Maasai. Some of these sites include the Ngong-Hills, which are a sacred Maasai Mountain where the first Maasai Seer (Laibon) was found. This Land is now a government reserve which is used by the Government in the tourism industry as a tourism attraction site, while the Maasai living around the Mountain don't receive any benefits from the earnings collected.

Another sacred mountain for the Maasai is Mt. Suswa at the floor of the Rift Valley. This is where the Maasai Right hand age group conducts an age set ceremony to open up the Way for other Maasai living in Kenya and Tanzania to develop an age set. The two Mountains have a common duty in accordance with the culture as well as Endoinyo Lasho in Tanzania, which gives the age Group a name. There are plants and other natural resources used in activities such as peace and conflict resolution that are only found on these mountains.

Due to modernization, the Maasai have found themselves in a dilemma because of government restrictions on movement, persistent droughts, famine, diseases and water shortage that are partly due to effects of large scale development programs.

In regard to the Bio-diversity conservation, the Government and other Agencies have taken advantages of Indigenous people in Kenya. The sacred sites and other reserves, which are largely found in Maasai land, are either run by the Government or by Companies.

I will just highlight a few examples of such disadvantages the Indigenous peoples are facing in Kenya:

- a) In its recent summit, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) declared the use of herbal medicine as a good way for improving health of the African people. This has exposed the skills and knowledge of the Indigenous people on medicinal plants to researches and other knowledgeable and powerful people within the Government systems to abuse the intellectual property rights of Indigenous people in regard to this field. Indigenous people have no funds, modern equipment etc. for modern research on their herbs.
- b) Large companies such as the Magadi Soda mining Company has been in the heart of Maasai land for over 100 years and no benefit has been seen by the local Maasai people. The Governments should devise a way by which the community can also benefit from the income.

- c) The Bio-diversity and eco-tourism projects funded by these Agencies such as the European Union, USAID and others have opened Maasai land to big investors who have taken away land of the Maasai for use of eco-tourism. The Maasai are only used as objects of charity through photography and culture. Land is also being exposed to investors through formation of conservancies and sanctuaries.

In recent publications, scientists are focusing on globalization and argue about a "time to re-think everything". Science and technology are a force behind global change. As for the Indigenous people where will they be left?

Donor agencies and other UN bodies should consult with Indigenous people before they approve environmental projects affecting Indigenous groups.

I hope and trust that the Permanent Forum will grow strong and become a bridge by which Indigenous peoples can pass through their views regarding issues affecting them.

Thank you,

N. Ole Sakuda