

Permanent Forum  
On Indigenous Issues  
First Session  
New York  
13-24May



Agenda Item 6  
Review of the activities of the United Nations system  
Theme:6  
Review of the activities of the United Nations system  
Theme: Environment

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Mr Chairperson,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak on the environment issues.

As we all know, Indigenous peoples across the globe are the carers of Mother Earth – this is no different for those of us in Australia.

We are pleased to see the various activities outlined in the briefing paper from Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) towards alleviating poverty and hunger throughout the world, and to learn that the FAO “approves international standards and helps frame international convention and agreements” (p. 3) on food and agricultural issues.

We are pleased also to see the inclusion of an information paper in the briefing papers on the Convention on Biological Diversity and the emphasis on Article 8(j) regarding the protection of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, 10(c) regarding the protection and customary use of biological resources, and 18(4) regarding the development of traditional technologies.

We are especially pleased to see the importance given to 8(j) regarding Indigenous rights “to enjoy the benefits which arise from the application of their traditional knowledge and practices” (p. 1).

Sadly, Mr Chairperson, but not surprisingly, we again see in another of the briefing papers the absence of a specific plan on how to address Indigenous Peoples’ many concerns about hunger and poverty under colonial regimes or to address the environmental concerns of Indigenous peoples throughout the world.

It is worrying that the FAO paper does not refer or cite the Convention on Biological Diversity. Or should we not worry about this?

We are however especially pleased that the FAO paper has acknowledged the role of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues as an expert committee on Indigenous issues. In Australia, we would say to them, “good on ya mate!”

We should bear in mind that whilst the Forum is regarded here as an important element to the FAO’s agenda on food and agricultural

issues, the Forum is a subsidiary organ of the Economic & Social Council.

Mr Chairperson, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has to be seen as a leader of Indigenous agendas and priorities in the United Nations system from the outset and not simply as a consultative body for Indigenous items on the agendas of different UN programmes.

Ostensibly, Mr Chairperson, the Forum should lead the way.

We offer the following suggestions:

The Forum needs to devise and set the global plan for the Indigenous issues so that UN departments, organisations and their many programmes can prioritise their activities to the same ends.

The Forum needs to formalise structures and processes so there is consistency across the UN system for the conception, design, delivery and evaluation of their programmes and activities.

The Forum needs to set clear expectations for statistical information to be disaggregated from existing data sets so that measures of performance and degree of outcomes can be identified and reported.

The Forum needs to draw up protocols to help guide UN activities on the ground and to set clear ethical pathways for their fieldwork.

And the Forum needs to identify procedures for the reporting of violations of set standards on environmental issues as well as a course of action to apprehend situations before any environmental damage occurs.

Mr Chairperson, I know that the Permanent Forum members will be overwhelmed by the many suggestions and recommendations by the end of next week but if we are to have consistency across the UN with Indigenous issues be it with the FAO and CBD or between other stated portfolios and positions, I would respectfully reassert that your leadership in these new times on the Indigenous issues will be all important.

Mr Chairperson, we stand by you and your colleagues - ready to assist in any way we can.

Thank you.