

STATEMENT AT THE SPECIAL SESSION ON URBAN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
AND MIGRATION, 21 May 2007, New York

Selman Ergüden
Head of Shelter Branch
United Nations Human Settlements Programme

Thank you Madam Chairperson,

Good afternoon distinguished participants, colleagues, friends,
ladies and gentlemen:

I will try to summarize the background of this very important topic
and where we currently stand especially regarding our most recent
joint initiative *between a number of UN agencies.*

*urban
indigenous
peoples
and migration*

As we are all aware, most of humanity will soon live in cities, and
the trend of global urbanisation is irreversible. Cities, in general,
are the engines of economic, social and cultural development and
realization of human rights, but can also generate and intensify
social exclusion of disadvantaged and marginalised groups
including indigenous peoples. The majority of indigenous peoples
globally still live in rural areas; but we know that more and more
of them are voluntarily or involuntarily migrating to urban areas.
The global urbanisation process is increasingly affecting
indigenous peoples in diverse ways in many countries both in the
developed and developing regions.

We know that a number of push and pull-factors have been
prompting migration of indigenous peoples to urban areas: land
dispossession, displacement, military conflict, natural disasters. In
short, the overall deterioration of their traditional livelihoods for
various reasons coupled with the absence of viable economic
alternatives are the push factors; the prospect of better economic
and social opportunities in cities is the main pull factor. Indeed,
urban life offers many opportunities as well as challenges.

It is however a fact that indigenous peoples in many cases face substantial difficulties in urban areas: lack of employment and income generating activities, limited access to services, and, very importantly, inadequate housing. Furthermore, violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms is often the main underlying cause for persisting poverty among urban indigenous communities.

In recognising these challenges and with the objective of furthering the research undertaken on indigenous peoples' right to adequate housing by the United Nations Housing Rights Programme in 2005, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues gave UN-HABITAT the mandate of organizing, jointly with relevant UN agencies, an expert group meeting on the theme with a broader context, namely "Urban Indigenous Peoples and Migration".

As you are aware, Madam Chairperson, we have organized this expert group meeting in Santiago de Chile in March 2007, as a joint effort between UN-HABITAT, OHCHR, Secretariat of the UNPFII, CELADE - ECLAC and the IOM. The meeting, generously supported by the Government of Canada and hosted by ECLAC, was successful in bringing together 75 participants, with many of them indigenous experts from various countries and organizations.

Our specific objectives were to:

- Assess impacts of the migration process on indigenous peoples;
- Analyse their living conditions and human rights situation in urban areas with the aim of generating comprehensive knowledge based on latest research findings;
- Evaluate current policies and practices and their effects; and
- Elaborate recommendations on how to improve urban indigenous peoples' living and human rights conditions.

The meeting was structured into 5 half-day substantive sessions. During the opening session, statements were made by ~~Mr. José Luis~~

Latin America and the Caribbean Demographic Centre

~~Machinea~~, the Executive Secretary of ECLAC; ~~Mr. Salinas Juan~~
~~Alberto Parra~~, National Director of the Corporación Nacional de
Desarrollo Indígena (CONADI); ~~Mr. Fred Caron~~, Assistant Deputy
Minister for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada - Office of the
Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians; and others.
Furthermore, a message from ^{from} ~~Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka~~, the Executive
Director of UN-HABITAT, was read on her behalf. During the first
substantive session, key note presentations and the ensuing
discussion centered on the topics of "indigenous peoples and
migration", "indigenous peoples in the urban setting", and "human
rights of urban indigenous peoples".

In the course of the following sessions, experts presented and
discussed case studies from Latin America and the Caribbean; the
Arctic Region; North America, Pacific, Eastern Europe, including
Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia; Africa and
Asia. The meeting was concluded with an in-depth discussion of the
findings, elaboration of recommendations and efforts to devise a
road map for follow-up and future action. Mr. Pablo Yanes ^{of Mexico} and Ms.
Octaviana Trujillo ^{of USA} were respectively elected as the Chairperson
and Rapporteur of the meeting. They indeed fulfilled their
functions in a very capable manner.

Madam Chairperson,

Since the report of this meeting is already available, I ~~think I~~
^{will} ~~should~~ not take more time to go into more detail. Colleagues from
the co-organizing agencies are here ~~today~~ ^{every} and will highlight issues
related to their respective focus areas. There will also be a
presentation of the conclusions and recommendations by another
colleague.

So I would like to conclude by thanking firstly the Government of
Canada for their generous support, secondly to all participants who
made this event very rich in substance, and thirdly to all colleagues
in the UN family who have worked very hard. Without their

valuable efforts and excellent guidance, this truly inter-agency and multi-cultural initiative could not have been materialized.