

Chairperson

ADDRESS TO THE OPENING OF THE 13th SESSION OF THE PERMANENT FORUM ON
INDIGENOUS ISSUES

New York, 12 May 2014

- Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon;
- Your Excellency Ambassador **John W. Ashe, President of the General Assembly**
- Your Excellency Ambassador **Martin Sajdik, President of ECOSOC**
Sir Jerry Mateparae the Governor-General of New Zealand
Ms. Nuvia Magdalena Mayorga Delgado, Director General of the National Commission
for the Development of Indigenous Peoples, Mexico
- **Mr. Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs**
- Distinguished Expert Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and in particular, the nine new Members;
- Distinguished observers from Member States, Indigenous Peoples' Organizations, the Inter-Governmental system, non-governmental organizations, the academia, the media, our Indigenous sisters and brothers, Indigenous youth and Indigenous parliamentarians....

It is with great pleasure that I welcome all of you here today at this Thirteenth Session of the Permanent Forum.

First, let us all acknowledge the Onondaga Nation and Tado/daho Sid Hill, the traditional Chief of the Onondaga Nation, the original inhabitants of this land, and to say Quyanaq, "thank you", for the welcome into their beautiful territory once again.

I would like to thank my colleagues, the Expert Members of the Forum for their confidence in me and for their support for my nomination. It is important to acknowledge their depth of knowledge and the value that they bring to the Forum. I deeply appreciate their unwavering contributions toward fulfilling the mandate of the Forum and carrying out their work with commitment and diligence, which is all done on a voluntary basis.

Throughout our lives, each of us has lost extraordinary leaders, individuals that have devoted their lives to gaining recognition of and respect for our fundamental human rights as Indigenous peoples. Today, I want to recognize the contributions of one such leader: Billy Frank, Jr., who passed away on May 5th in his own home, the territory of the Nisqually Tribe. His efforts were focused upon honoring the treaties that affirmed the Nisqually peoples' right to harvest salmon and their reliance upon the Nisqually River, from the head waters to the mouth of the river. He was an important advocate for all Indigenous peoples who rely upon salmon to sustain themselves, including my own. Let us all remember his life and honor his legacy.

Over the past year, the Forum members have engaged in various processes at the national, regional and international levels to raise awareness on issues of importance to Indigenous peoples. Consistent with principles of good governance and a human rights-based approach, we have worked to promote and ensure the full, equal and effective participation of indigenous peoples within the United Nations. Creating space for our democratic participation in United Nations processes and mechanisms is absolutely necessary. This fundamental right must be respected and recognized in all contexts, including those related to the high level plenary to be known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

In this regard, I would like to thank the representatives of Indigenous peoples' organizations, nations and governments who have taken steps to implement this important principle in relation to the ongoing dialogue concerning the World Conference. We appreciate their advocacy on behalf of all Indigenous peoples. Realizing the fundamental principle of equality and respect for the right of Indigenous peoples to directly participate in this proposed gathering remains elusive. Let us hope that the political milieu eventually changes in favor of Indigenous peoples.

The Forum members are especially thankful to the Government of Mexico for their support in this specific dialogue as well as for hosting our pre-session meeting, which took place March 26-28, 2014 in Mexico City. The pre-session meeting allowed the Members to plan for this important 13th Session. We were also pleased to meet with Indigenous peoples of Mexico, democratically elected

Parliamentarians, representatives of the UN Country Team, and a diverse array of officials of the executive branch of the Government of Mexico.

Before turning to the highlights of our program of work for the coming two weeks, I would like to underscore that a number of Forum members have been consistently concerned with our own methods of work and the need to become a much more effective mechanism within the UN system. This message was candidly delivered by a number of Indigenous peoples last year, under the agenda item of future work.

Please know that we have initiated a discussion concerning important reforms, many of which may prove difficult to adjust to. However, if the objective of the Forum is to be responsive to the promotion and protection of the human rights of Indigenous peoples within the UN system, we must explore and initiate dramatic reform to do so. Specifically, the Forum must sharpen its focus on the number of recommendations that it accepts as well as limit the number of studies to be concluded by its members.

There is also a need for us to concentrate upon the wide array of UN agencies to ensure that they are in fact responsive to the human rights, interests and concerns of Indigenous peoples at all levels. We will also discuss the potential for future sessions to include "working meetings" between Indigenous peoples and governments, on a regional basis, in order to identify and agree upon issues of crucial, regional concern that can be effectively addressed by the UN, especially at the regional and country level.

Furthermore, we must invigorate the role of each Expert Member and enhance the contributions that they can make to Indigenous peoples globally and within their respective regions. At present, Expert Members do not have the resources to undertake consultations in their own regions or beyond. To do so, it will be necessary for additional funds to be raised to allow for more concrete, action-oriented work to be done by all 16 members. We hope that we can count on the support of member states and other donors to assist us in making such reforms possible and thereby ensure greater effectiveness of the Forum as a UN mechanism.

We must also initiate a discussion about the false dichotomy of limiting UN agencies to only assist Indigenous peoples in developing countries and not those equally marginalized in the so-called developed world. In addition, we must affirm the status of the Forum in relation to the Economic and Social Council and explore options for affirming and expanding our role in terms of reporting to and influencing the work of the Economic and Social Council. Ultimately, the objective of the Forum is to ensure that Indigenous peoples do have a "home" within the UN, a "home" that is welcoming and is accorded an equitable and dignified status within this family of nations.

Let me now turn to the work to be accomplished over the next two weeks. At this Thirteenth Session of the Forum, the special theme is "Principles of Good Governance consistent with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, [Articles 3 through 6 and Article 46]". This important theme was identified in order to highlight the fundamental principles by which every government on earth should adhere to in favor of all of their citizens - but in particular in favor of the Indigenous peoples, nations and communities that find themselves within the borders of the states that have grown up around us.

By giving full effect to the principles of good governance, we can, at a minimum, cooperatively work toward the comprehensive implementation of the standards embraced by the UN Declaration [on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples]. The principles of transparency, inclusion, responsiveness, effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability are inter-related and mutually reinforcing. Moreover, they are all crucial elements of ensuring equality and non-discrimination in relation to Indigenous peoples and their distinct status and human rights.

This afternoon, there will be a panel discussion on this theme, to be followed by an Open and interactive Dialogue with States, Indigenous Peoples and UN Agencies.

This past February, the Forum convened a three-day international expert group meeting on the theme: "Sexual and Reproductive Health". The conclusions and recommendations of that meeting will be shared with all participants. The meeting report was adopted by consensus and is included among the session documents.

On Thursday, the regional focus will be on **Asia** and will include a plenary panel with presentations by Forum members, indigenous peoples' organizations, States and UN Agencies.

On Thursday afternoon, there will be a dialogue with UN Agencies. UNICEF, the Chair of the Inter-Agency Support group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues (IASG) will present the annual report of the IASG, followed by discussions with UN-REDD.

On Friday, there will be a session on the **On-going Priorities and Themes** on:

- (a) Indigenous Children;
- (b) Indigenous Youth
- (c) Second Decade on the World's Indigenous Peoples; and
- (d) the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Some of the discussion on these themes will continue next week on Wednesday May 21st.

Next Monday May 19th, we begin the week with a discussion on **the High Level Plenary Meeting to be known as the World Conference**. These discussions will be conducted in consultation with the Office of the President of the General Assembly.

Next Tuesday May 20th, there will be a focus on **Human Rights**. This agenda item includes a critical focus on the Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and there will be statements from:

- **The Chair of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.**
- A Member of the Board of Trustees of the **Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples**
- **Mr. Pavel Sulyandziga, Working Group on the issue of *human rights* and transnational corporations and other *business enterprises*.**
- **Mr. Jose Francisco Cali Tzay, Committee on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and**
- **Ms. Soyata Maiga, Chairperson, Working Group on Indigenous Populations/Communities in Africa**

In addition, we will engage in an interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, who will soon be concluding his mandate. I would like to take this opportunity

to acknowledge the significant work that Professor S. James Anaya has been able to accomplish over his two consecutive terms. He has made a substantive contribution to the status and human rights of Indigenous peoples through this special mandate. His consistent diplomacy, critical analysis, reports, recommendations and perspectives will all have a lasting impact; one that we know will continue to assist in re-defining Indigenous/state relations in a positive fashion.

In regard to the dialogue with the Special Rapporteur, there is a request that speakers make interventions specifically directed to him and his work. I would also respectfully request that participants contribute to an actual inter-active dialogue, allowing for sustained discussion on particular topics or subjects rather than registering a series of unrelated interventions.

On Thursday May 22nd we will address the change of name for the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to the Permanent Forum on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Your clear, concise interventions on this issue would be greatly appreciated.

You will also hear throughout the session the introduction of the studies written by Forum members. These reports have been prepared with a view to addressing global, overarching themes. This approach allows for the Forum and its members to influence and shape global policy so as to ensure greater affirmation and recognition of indigenous peoples' human rights.

These are just some of the highlights to be covered during this 13th session.

We have a very full agenda, including approximately 60 side and cultural events. Most of these events will take place at the lunch hour, evenings and during the closed meetings of the Forum. The list of side events are on the Forum's website.

Unfortunately, due to on-going renovations in the lobby, there will not be an indigenous exhibit. However, we will still host a cultural event. The cultural event and reception will take place on Tuesday May 13th, beginning at 6.15 pm on the Second Floor of the North Lawn Building.

In closing, there is an urgent need for all of us and in particular, member states, to take collaborative and coordinated actions, actions that are bold and effective, to address the continuing discrimination, racism, marginalization, extreme poverty, and conflict faced by Indigenous Peoples across the globe. Indifference to these urgent realities should not be tolerated because, as we well know, indifference is the breeding ground for intolerance.

We should always remember that Indigenous peoples and our human rights are the very reason for the existence of the Permanent Forum. Therefore, I wish to appeal to member states and other potential donors to assist us in overcoming the financial barriers that prevent many from participating in the Indigenous-specific work of the UN by contributing to the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples as well as to the Trust Fund.

In advance, I would like to express our appreciation for the work of the Forum Secretariat, the staff of Conference Services, and to also acknowledge the work of the Documentation Center for Indigenous Peoples. Since 1977, DOCIP has been an important organization for thousands of Indigenous individuals, carefully and apolitically assisting many of us with basic necessities such as computers, printers, and copy machines and by providing a vital record of our work within the UN system.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the Indigenous peoples of the world, who continue the struggle for recognition of and respect for their distinct human rights, sometimes sacrificing their own lives in the process. I call upon all of us to work together to make meaningful and worthwhile changes through this Forum for the survival, dignity, security and well-being of all Indigenous peoples.

Quyanasuaq. Thank You.