

PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES OPENS FOURTH SESSION WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In Efforts to Achieve Goals, Indigenous People Must Not Be Forgotten, Discriminated Against or Marginalized, Forum Told

Indigenous people are called 'first peoples', 'tribal peoples', 'aboriginals' and 'autochthons'. They have a historical continuity with the pre-invasion or pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories. They consider themselves distinct from other sectors that make up the dominant society where they find themselves. There are at least 5000 indigenous groupings made up of about 300 million people, living in more than 70 countries on five continents.

Indigenous people in many nations are still among the poorest and most marginalized, and their communities are often victims of the effects of armed conflict, Louise Fréchette, Deputy Secretary-General, told the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Member States have still not adopted the declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, despite many years of negotiation and advocacy. Indigenous people and the international community must draw up a concrete plan of action leading to measurable improvements in standards of living and greater respect for indigenous rights.



Bringing together some 1,500 indigenous leaders, activists and representatives, this year's Forum is focusing on indigenous people and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, and achieving universal primary education. It will offer to the UN system recommendations based on discussion in its 6 mandated areas: culture, economic and social development, education, environment, health, human rights. Indigenous people must not be forgotten, discriminated against, or remain marginalized in efforts to achieve the MDGs.

Addressing the Millennium Goal on poverty, Nana Effah-Apenteng (Ghana), Acting President of the General Assembly, stressed that Indigenous perspectives should be integrated

into the Millennium Goals process. She said that development models affecting indigenous people must be in harmony with the values and life vision of indigenous peoples. Too many indigenous groups face threats to their land, natural resources, identities and even existence.

During the discussion on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, the link between poverty and human rights was stressed. Those people born into poverty remain where they are unless relevant rights are implemented. Pointing to studies that show indigenous people suffered more than others from extreme poverty, Louise Arbour, High Commissioner for Human Rights emphasized that such groups had a right to participate fully in development efforts. Poverty reduction programmes must not lead to injustices against indigenous peoples, by depriving them of their lands or traditional means of existence.

Underscoring the importance of community involvement in reducing poverty, Jeffrey Sachs, United Nations Millennium Project Director and Adviser to the Secretary-General, stressed the importance of considering the specific conditions of each community. Comparing the Forum's goals to those of the Millennium Project, he said they both focused on local empowerment and active community participation in their own futures.

Many speakers stressed the need for governments to fulfil their commitments to follow a rights-based approach to development and the reduction of poverty, emphasizing the benefits of adhering to fundamental human rights. They stressed that indigenous peoples must be involved in drawing up Millennium Goal poverty reduction strategy papers. In addition, several focused on environmental issues and poverty.



The session was opened with a traditional procession of indigenous Peruvian children and youth, accompanied by harp and violin. Radford Quamahongwewa, War Chief and Spokesperson for the elders and leaders of the Hopi Indian Nation village of Shangopau, then offered words of blessing in his native tongue.

Following are the central issues that concern Indigenous peoples at this time:

- *The resistance of some countries to approve the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.*
- *Because they hold things in common, the issue of collective versus individual property rights affecting intellectual property, stewardship of the biodiversity within their lands; traditional knowledge being pirated for profit by corporations.*
- *The critical need for mother-tongue as the medium for education and as a tool for competence, self-esteem and poverty eradication.*
- *In the rush to meet the Millennium Development Goals, models of development must be respectful of indigenous values and world-vision.*
- *The principle of free, prior and informed consent must underpin all development negotiations with non-indigenous actors.*



Name	Country of Origin
Gladys Alban	Ecuador
Maureen Bennett	U.S.
Alba Iris Cruz	Puerto Rico
Mary Galeone	U.S.
Valeria Guerrero	Honduras
Breige Lavery	Ireland
Catherine Loreda	Belize
Maria Mercado	Puerto Rico
Margarita Navarro	Mexico
Janny Olivero	Dominican Republic
Petronila Rojas	Dominican Republic
Lydia Santiago	Puerto Rico
Patrese Scott	U.S.
Alba Torres	Puerto Rico
Nancy Walsh	U.S.