

16 May 2007



Economic and Social Council

HR/4919

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Sixth Session
5th Meeting (PM)

SPEAKERS CALL FOR INCREASED INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OF INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

IMPROVED PARTICIPATION IN OWN DEVELOPMENT, AS FORUM DEBATE CONTINUES

Native American Tribal Leader Says Lands Being Plundered, People Now in Life and Death Struggle to Protect Birthright

Representatives of national indigenous movements fighting to protect their dwindling territories and the right to manage the natural resources found there today urged the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to help them find ways to increase international recognition of indigenous rights and improve the participation of native peoples in their own development.

Recognizing that most of the world's remaining natural resources -- minerals, freshwater, potential energy sources and more -- are found within indigenous peoples' territories, the sixth annual session of the Permanent Forum has brought indigenous groups together with representatives of Governments, intergovernmental organizations and United Nations agencies to state their views, voice concerns and suggest solutions regarding their lands, territories and natural resources.

Speakers representing indigenous collectives from all regions of the world -- from South-East Asia to East Africa to North America -- called for broad adherence to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which included an article guaranteeing the participation of indigenous peoples in their own development and urged the protection and promotion of their traditional knowledge. They stressed that native communities lived in harmony with, and close dependence on, biological resources, and States should, therefore, make use of their traditional knowledge, especially concerning the conservation and sustainable use of those resources.

Delivering a statement on behalf of the Shoshone Defense Project and associated organizations, a Native American tribal leader said that corporations were now plundering the air, water and sun -- "the creator's gifts" -- on indigenous lands. Native and "First Nation" peoples were now in a life and death struggle to maintain their territories and protect their birthright.

The Western Shoshone were being forced to accept monetary compensation for their communal lands by the United States and foreign countries, he said. Greedy Governments knew that, once they were gone, it would be easier to get the mineral, water and natural gas resources. He called on the Permanent Forum to help unite the world's indigenous people in the effort to raise awareness about the connections between environmental destruction, resource exploitation and the promotion and protection of the fundamental rights of native communities.

The representative of the Centre d'accompagnement des Autochtones Pygmées et Minoritaires Vulnerables said territories and natural resources of the Democratic Republic of the Congo had been traditionally managed by indigenous Pygmies. Since 1994, those assets had been used for military purposes and by non-indigenous entities. Worse, militias operating in the dense jungles largely ignored the national Forestry and Mining Code, as well as the Pygmies fundamental rights.

He said that communities bordering the forests had felt no positive impact from concessions, and it appeared that major funding agencies like the World Bank were unconcerned. He called the Forestry and Mining Code “discriminatory”, in that it did not recognize or protect the rights of indigenous peoples. In 2005, Pygmy organizations had complained about violations by the World Bank and the Bank had concluded there should be an inquiry. He asked the Forum to maintain the moratorium on forest concession for at least a decade; and that there be advocacy with the Government and the Bank to develop new strategies of cooperation.

The Permanent Forum began its work this afternoon hearing Government positions, during which the Senior Assistant Deputy Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs in Canada said his country respected rights regarding territories, lands and natural resources in the spirit of reconciliation. Taking into account the different situations of aboriginal peoples, reconciliation work had taken different forms. Inuit, for example, had their own ideas on how their rights should be recognized, as did provincial and territorial governments.

He said that processes to address rights to lands and resources existed within the context of a dynamic relationship among the Government, aboriginal peoples, courts and non-aboriginal citizens. Resolution lay in the principles of reconciliation and negotiation. Reconciliation was not just a legal exercise and, thus, a “one size fits all” approach was not practical. Significant investments of time and financial resources in negotiation were required, he said, noting also that a structured plan for implementation of agreements was essential, and included ongoing monitoring and information sharing.

The representatives of the following countries also made presentations: Philippines, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, Chile and the Observer for the Holy See.

Representatives from the following indigenous organization also addressed the Forum: Association of Indigenous Peoples of Ryukyu; American Indian Law Alliance; Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN); Lawyers Association for Human Rights of Nepalese Indigenous Peoples; Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON); African Caucus; Pacific Caucus; Latin American Caucus; Kenya National Commission on Human Rights; Organizacion Payipe Ichade Totobiegosode; Sarawak Dayak National Union; International Indian Treaty Council; Asociacion Juventud Indigena Argentina; Laguna Acoma Coalition for a Safe Environment; and the World Amazigh Congress.

Also speaking were the representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, International Labour Organization (ILO), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The Permanent Forum will reconvene at 10 a.m. Thursday, 17 May, to consider implementation of its recommendations on the Millennium Development Goals.

Background

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues met today to continue its sixth annual session on the special theme “Territories, lands and natural resources”. The session, which runs through 25 May, was also expected to examine urban indigenous peoples and migration, indigenous peoples in Asia and data collection and disaggregation. For background, see Press Release [HR/4916](#) issued 11 May 2007.

Exchange with Governments

The Committee began its work this afternoon hearing Government positions, beginning with DANIEL WATSON, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs in Canada, who said his country respected rights regarding territories, lands and natural resources in the spirit of reconciliation. Taking into account the different situations of aboriginal peoples, reconciliation work had taken different forms. Inuit, for example, had their own ideas on how their rights should be recognized, as did provincial and territorial governments.

There had been significant investment in the negotiation processes to achieve reconciliation in the area of land claims and self-government, he said, noting investment in exploratory treaty processes and commissions to find common ground in addressing historic treaties. The comprehensive land claims process provided for a

negotiated resolution of aboriginal land rights and claims in parts of Canada where aboriginal rights and title had not been addressed.

Over the past 30 years, Canada had negotiated 20 comprehensive land claim agreements or “modern treaties”, bringing certainty to aboriginal rights in about 40 per cent of Canada geographically. Those treaties included some 90 aboriginal communities with more than 70,000 members. Those treaties confirmed ownership of over 600,000 square kilometres of land and provided aboriginal groups with over \$2.4 billion in capital transfers. Most of those treaties had associated self-government or political rights.

Aboriginal claims covered forests, preserves, flora, the resources of sub-soil and water, he continued. On natural resources, Canada was cooperating with aboriginal peoples outside negotiations related to claims, for instance, in the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy, which offered the needed framework for fishery management and the First Nation Forest Programme, which allowed the First Nations to be present in the forestry sector. The impact and benefit agreements negotiated between companies and aboriginal groups had become common practice in Canada and were the primary means to ensure benefits were shared among all parties.

He said that processes to address aboriginal rights to lands and resources existed within the context of a dynamic relationship among the Government, aboriginal peoples, courts and non-aboriginal citizens. Resolution lay in the principles of reconciliation and negotiation. Reconciliation was not just a legal exercise and, thus, a “one size fits all” approach was not practical. Significant investments of time and financial resources in negotiation were required, he said, noting also that a structured plan for implementation of agreements was essential. Implementation management should include ongoing monitoring and information sharing.

BAYANI S. MERCADO (Philippines) said the Forum was meeting against the backdrop of what could be described as a “turning point” for indigenous peoples all over the world. The issue of land was at the core of indigenous peoples’ lives. There were an estimated 12 million indigenous people who occupied 6 million hectares of ancestral domains in the Philippines, about 20 per cent of the total land area. He highlighted the passage of the Philippine Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997.

He agreed that implementation was crucially important and the Government had issued 57 Certificates of Ancestral Domain Titles, with a total 1.1 million hectares, and 172 Certificates of Land Titles to indigenous peoples, covering 4.8 million hectares. Further, the Philippines had fast-tracked the provision of ancestral domain development blueprints. The Government also had promoted the rights of indigenous peoples to free and prior informed consent, with the core concept that all indigenous peoples should determine policies and plans to meet their priority needs.

Achieving peace was a prerequisite for indigenous peoples to live with security in their lands, and overcoming challenges to the peace processes between the Government and non-State armed groups remained a paramount objective, he continued. The Government was playing a proactive role in adjudicating conflicts related to ancestral domain and property rights. Further, the National Commission had engaged in dialogues with other Government agencies.

He was heartened that discussions in the Inter-Agency Support Group were being enhanced and looked forward to strengthened collaboration with the agencies. He hoped the issue of collecting and establishing baseline data for indigenous peoples would be highlighted at the session. The Philippines was committed to improving its performance of upholding the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples, as provided for in national law.

WENCESLAO HERRERA, Federal Deputy of the Congress of Mexico, said that the Forum’s discussion had been focused on the struggle of indigenous peoples to hold on to, and sustainably use, their lands, territories, and natural resources. The Forum’s participants had also highlighted the fact that States were not abiding by the relevant objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity, as well as the fact that indigenous and tribal people were largely left out of national decision-making processes. To address some of those challenges, he said that indigenous people themselves should exercise political clout in their nation States, as well as mobilize civil society to raise awareness about their concerns and interests. He called on the Forum to press for training programmes for indigenous people on political participation and management, as well as the creation of a global fund to finance such training and participation.

Responding to comments and concerns made yesterday about his Government's policies on indigenous rights, GREG RUSH, Department of Family Services and Indigenous Affairs of Australia, said it was a time of significant reform in various aspects of indigenous affairs, including housing, economic development and education. Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders had close links to their lands and it had been Government policy for more than 30 years to respect and recognize those links through the legal system.

On observations made by the rapporteur about reform of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, he took issue with the assertion of a "take it or leave it" attitude with traditional owners over the leasing of community townships. He pointed out that talks had lasted over five months and the final agreement consisted of a \$5 million cash payment for the first 15 years of the lease, plus proceeds from future rental payments. To the rapporteur's observation that land rights reforms were designed to benefit non-indigenous people, he said that was "simply incorrect". The major beneficiaries of those reforms would be indigenous residents of those communities who were not traditional owners. Those people formed the majority of residents of most Northern Territories. Concerns that those communities would be overrun with non-indigenous residents could be accommodated through the terms of the head lease. In Nguiu, the head lease specified that non-indigenous people would be limited to no more than 15 per cent of the population for the term of the lease.

Addressing questions posed by the Forum on mechanisms to protect collective land rights, he said leases only operated in townships that formed a small part of the total amount of land held by traditional owners. The underlying collective title was unchanged by the granting of any head lease, and that scheme was voluntary. Further, safeguards were set out in relevant legislation. To a question on whether Australia's concerns about the draft Declaration were related to draft articles on land and resources, he said Australia was committed to a Declaration Member States could implement.

NICOLA HILL (New Zealand), speaking on the question of consultation, said in her country, Maori represented 15 per cent of the population and their representation in Parliament stood at 17 per cent. Consultation mechanisms with indigenous peoples operated at all levels and sectors of Government, she added, highlighting the Treaty of Waitangi. New Zealand recognized principles of partnership and reasonableness, active protection and redress. There was also provision to foster the capacity of Maori to respond to any request to consult.

CELESTINO MIGLIORE, Permanent Observer for the Holy See, said that the Holy See had been disappointed that the General Assembly failed to adopt the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Much had happened since the Forum's last session regarding steps to improve the exercise of rights of indigenous peoples at national and international levels. He noted that various objections had been raised to the text, including that some had said that it contradicted national constitutions, and the self-determination only concerned those who used to live under colonial rule. Others claimed to support the Declaration, while suggesting at the same time that the text was unclear on just what was an "indigenous person".

While respecting the motivations behind those and other positions, he said that the Holy See would reiterate the particular importance it attached to the Declaration, and would encourage Member States to show flexibility and social farsightedness with a view to reaching an agreement during the Assembly's current session. The Holy See believed that such a political gesture would not only benefit the poorest and most excluded citizens in both rich and poor countries, it would also enhance peace among all peoples and foster the just and equitable enjoyment of human rights for all.

He said that, judging by the discussions in the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) last year, there appeared to be genuine concerns that the Declaration could lead to demands that might break fragile links forged at great cost among disparate tribal groups born as States within the last 50 years. Some also feared that the Declaration might become a threat to sovereignty or to State revenues from natural resources. Such concerns, however, should not be allowed to marginalize the best interests of the poorest peoples in resource-rich territories, nor should States be oblivious to the economic progress for all that could be achieved by a greater regard for the particular genius of indigenous peoples.

Finally, he said that the rush to exploit natural resources not only put natural habitats under stress, the peoples living and depending on those habitats seemed to reap very little in the way of political, social or economic benefits. That was why the Holy See believed that all stakeholders should work towards a consensus adoption of the Declaration. The absence of such consensus should not be used as pretext for not addressing the legitimate concerns of indigenous peoples.

Experts' Comments

HASSAN ID BALKASSM, expert from Morocco, thanked all the Governments for their participation, especially Australia, which had responded to concerns raised by experts yesterday. To Canada's representative, he said that it appeared that there were still inconsistencies in the Canadian Constitution regarding the protection of First Nation and other indigenous peoples in Canada. There appeared to be many court cases that had found in favour of the land rights of First Nation members. Why was the Government having such difficulty in appending a text on the rights of indigenous peoples to the Constitution? To the Philippines' representative, he said that it appeared that Government was not taking traditional practices, languages and cultures seriously in that country. What the attitude of the Government towards such practices.

Responding to Australia's statement, MICK DODSON, expert from Australia, said that he had some concerns that the Government's representative said that the expert's comments were not based of facts. Mr. Dodson said that he and the Government representative might just have to "agree to disagree" on what was meant by "take it or leave it". He also said that Australian radio had aired interviews with Tiwi indigenous representatives who said that they had not known what they were signing when they had been presented with the 99-year lease agreement. Further, if the Government was offering new houses and additional health resources in exchange for 99-year land-use leases, it seemed fair that he argue that the proposal had been a "take it or leave it" deal: "If you take it, you get [new homes, upgraded recreational facilities]. If you don't, you won't," he added. He also said that, while he welcomed the discussion, he stood by his comments from yesterday. The policies were not paving the way to economic development. Perhaps the discussion should focus on shared objectives in that regard.

Presentations by Indigenous Groups and Agencies

Making a joint statement on behalf of the Association of Indigenous Peoples of Ryukyus, a speaker said "Ryukyu Kingdom", or Okinawa, had become a Japanese colony in 1879. After the Second World War, the United States Armed Forces requisitioned the land and built a huge military base there. The expropriation of land on Okinawa by the United States was placing a heavy burden on the land and peoples of the area. Her group had continued to press the Japanese Government to address the matter, because the landowners on Okinawa under United States military occupation were prohibited from entering their own lands and cemeteries. She called on the Forum to urge the Japanese Government to recognize the Ainus and the Okinawans as indigenous peoples of Japan and to take action to establish the rights to land and resources, including restitution and compensation.

Chief OREN LYONS, on behalf of the American Indian Law Alliance, said that prior to Columbus's landfall on Turtle Islands, millions of indigenous and native peoples were living in harmony in the northern hemisphere. The prevailing laws were based on respect for land and nature and the peoples were acutely aware of their "role in the complex web of life". The ancient laws of planet earth were written in the hearts of those first peoples. But, according to the "Doctrine of Discovery", after Columbus made his discovery, things changed for the northern hemisphere and Europeans claimed the lands as "the Americas" and labelled the people living on them "heathens and savages". The United States had continued to promote selective Government rights, abrogating both hundred-year-old binding treaties and the tenets of the United States Constitution. He called on the Forum to advance the Martines Treaty Study, to be taken to the International Court of Justice for an opinion on the status of treaties regarding the territorial rights of Native Americans.

The representative delivering a collective statement by Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN) said natural resources made it possible for them to be indigenous peoples. Elements of nature had nurtured the evolution of their identity, culture and belief systems. Ritual and beliefs were embedded in nature, she said, denouncing the idea that forests could be exploited as "green gold".

Indonesia had more than 100 million hectares of forest, the largest in South-East Asia. Some 30 per cent of land had been exploited for mining. Indigenous peoples had the right to nutrition and that had been violated when forests were destroyed. Their right to live a culturally diverse life was violated after land had been converted to plantations. She urged the Forum to express concern to Indonesia over its displacement of indigenous peoples for private business projects without free prior and informed consent. She urged the adoption of the Declaration and that an independent study be conducted on projects on traditional lands.

LARSON BILL, delivering a joint statement on behalf of the Shoshone Defense Project and associated organizations, said “LAWS” was an acronym for land, air, water and sun, the creator’s laws. Those laws would always be there and everyone would listen to what the indigenous people had to say. Indigenous peoples were caretakers of mother earth. They must now struggle to maintain their lands, because they were faced with greed. The Western Shoshone people were being forced to accept monetary compensation for their lands by the United States. Most, however, would not accept money for their lands. Like all traditional peoples, they would teach misinformed brothers and sisters that the LAWS were in effect. There was no global warming, only global warning.

The representative of the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) and associated organizations, said disrespect for traditional lands was a form of genocide of indigenous peoples. Nepal was undergoing political change, including the writing of a new Constitution and the restructuring of the State. Indigenous peoples were struggling to retain their confiscated land. In such a critical situation, the informal visit of the special rapporteur was very significant. His trip was an expression of solidarity. In that context, she asked the Forum to recommend that the destruction in traditional land during armed conflict be reconstructed according to the principle of free, prior and informed consent. Further, she recommended that the Government develop and respect traditional territories in restructuring the State.

A representative of indigenous peoples in Siberia said indigenous territories were seeing coal, oil, gas, and gold prospecting. It was no secret that today, the Russian budget was geared to extracting those assets and those initiatives were damaging the ancestral habitat. Indigenous peoples expected their rights to be observed in that process. Why did industrialists not ask for permission? Why were their interests not taken into account? The fate of the United Nations declaration was now in the hands of Governments. That text represented the best possible compromise of all parties and he was disappointed by the Russian Government’s position on the Declaration. He called for a dialogue on issues pertaining to indigenous peoples. He recommended the Forum call for the conclusion of deliberations on free, prior and informed consent. Governments should apply national legislation on that principle, particularly relating to lands and natural resources. He recommended that the Human Rights Council examine and adopt general recommendations on the practice of compliance of States with international human rights covenants.

The representative of the African Caucus, delivering the southern Africa regional statement, called for the constitutional recognition of her organization. She recommended that the Namibian conservancy model be studied, and further called on the South African Government to implement recommendations of the special rapporteur, especially to scrap the racial classification of Koi Koi people as “coloured”. That could be realized through holding consultations with those people.

Speaking on behalf of the Pacific Caucus, another representative said that mother earth and her waters were the source of identity for all the peoples the Caucus represented. She urged the Forum to help the Caucus impose a moratorium on all exploration throughout the Pacific islands, as well as for an end to all military build-up in the region. Such practices were seriously degrading the environment and destabilizing the fragile habitats that supported a way of life for millions of people. She said that the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples should, among other things, reaffirm the cultural, social and religious connection of native peoples to the lands and territories in which they lived.

A representative of the Latin American Caucus said that the Forum should be at the forefront of building global effort to undo years of anti-indigenous policies and programmes that had for decades undermined the rights of indigenous peoples to manage and sustainably use their lands and territories. He said that indigenous peoples of all nations should pressure their Governments to join and adhere to the Convention on Biological Diversity, to ensure the protection of indigenous genetic property rights.

A representative of the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights said that her agency had been established by an act of the Kenyan Parliament. The issue of indigenous people had been contentious and had raised “serious suspicion” in the Government and business and investment sectors. Such suspicion limited the space that such peoples could use to raise awareness about their situation. The Commission, in consultation with civil society, was in the process of establishing a Diversity Committee Team on indigenous issues. That team would ensure that matters related to the rights of indigenous people were kept on the national agenda.

Due to the significance of land to indigenous people, the issue, particularly regarding minorities, such as pastoralists and hunters and gatherers, was being talked about more openly. The Commission had received

petitions from Kenyan minorities regarding land allocation issues, several of which had alluded to Government corruption. As part of its attempt to deal with those and other issues, the Commission had visited regions where land violations were alleged to have occurred.

The representative of the Organizacion Payipe Ichade Totobiegosode said his organization for many years had been making claims, but the Paraguayan Government had disregarded the steps taken. It was for that reason that he was appearing in an international forum. Also, he wanted to raise awareness about issues that had an impact on communities living in isolation. He asked the Forum to urge States to report to it and the special rapporteur on the mechanisms used to protect the rights of indigenous people, particularly those living in isolation. Further, it was important to ensure those mechanisms were monitored, with the consultation and cooperation with indigenous peoples.

The representative of the Sararawak Dayak National Union said logging and deforestation was reflective of a process of native community displacement. He asked the Government to establish a native lands commission, to assist in the surveying of land, and in the giving of titles. Additionally, regarding lands that had been taken, he called for sufficient consultation with landowners and transparency in all deals. He said the local human rights commission should include indigenous representatives. Further, he called for a review of the land law and urged land disputes filed by native peoples to be expedited. Finally, he called for the adoption without delay of the Declaration.

The representative of the Centre d'accompagnement des Autochtones Pygmees et Minoritaires Vulnerables, said lands, territories and natural resources of the Democratic Republic of the Congo had been managed by indigenous pygmies. Since 1994, those assets had been used for military purposes and by non-indigenous entities. Pygmies had been used as “trackers” for hegemonic purposes that did not take into account their basic human rights. Regarding Laws 11 and 7 of the Forestry and Mining Code, he said exploitation had been disorderly and had disrupted the pygmies, who had not been consulted. Communities bordering the forests had felt no positive impact from concessions that had been exploited and the World Bank remained unconcerned. He called the Forestry and Mining Code “discriminatory”, in that it did not recognize or protect the rights of indigenous peoples. Pygmy organizations in 2005 had complained about violations by the World Bank and the Bank had concluded there should be an inquiry. He asked the Forum to maintain the moratorium on forest concession for at least a decade; and that there be advocacy with the Government and the World Bank to develop new strategies of cooperation.

The representative of the International Indian Treaty Council said control by corporations had been seen in many forms, including their control over mineral, gas, and oil resources. Traditional laws had been violated, and no adequate indicators existed to value or quantify indigenous peoples’ spiritual relationship with the land, water and sun. In that context, she was concerned about achieving all eight of the Millennium Development Goals and recommended that the Forum examine the impacts of extractive industries on indigenous peoples. Further, equal access to safe drinking water should be studied. Noting that a global expert seminar would be held in July 2008, she asked the Forum to encourage the High Commissioner to visit Shoshone territory on her next visit to the United States.

A representative of Asociacion Juventud Indigena Argentina said the few indigenous peoples with rights to territories, lands and natural resources had children who were in better health. For most indigenous peoples, however, those rights were not really guaranteed, which was why high child mortality rates, malnutrition and migration to urban centres persisted. Extractive industries had had a profound impact on indigenous communities. She recommended that States include in their public policies a holistic approach to land and natural resources, giving priority to adolescents. The life of adolescents and children were at risk and work should be undertaken in a committed way.

The representative of the Laguna Acoma Coalition for a Safe Environment said the recent Indigenous World Uranium Summit had included testimonies by over 300 indigenous peoples on nuclear effects. Governments were promoting a “nuclear renaissance” in response to climate change, noting that the United States was creating global nuclear partnerships and envisioned expansion of nuclear power worldwide. Indigenous peoples were concerned at the increase of uranium on the international market, now at an all-time high. That situation perpetuated injustices that existed in many countries, particularly those with meagre regulation. As a participant of the Indigenous World Uranium Summit, his organization was exercising free, prior and informed consent and asked the Forum to accept the Declaration from that Summit. Nuclear power

was no solution to global warming and international agreements had violated the fundamental laws of mother earth and endangered peoples' spiritual well-being.

Presentations by Agencies and Intergovernmental Organizations

Responding to some of the questions and comments that had been posed by Forum experts earlier in the week, a representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) said it was often very difficult to give exact figures on the budgets allocated for indigenous programmes, because usually the UNDP tried to integrate the funds earmarked for indigenous peoples with other areas of operation in a particular country. By example, she said that, in some countries, UNDP's initiatives targeted for women's capacity-building included a focus on indigenous women.

A representative of the World Bank said the bank was reviewing its plans and programmes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as assessing the impact of its initiatives on the indigenous people of that country. He looked forward to discussing the Bank's findings with the Congolese Government and civil society.

A representative of the International Labour Organization (ILO) said his agency was undertaking a number of studies to see what could be done to promote better opportunities for indigenous people wishing to practice traditional occupations and pursue communal livelihoods.

A representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said that her agency promoted information-sharing on the conservation and protection of sacred sites, as well as on the conservation of biological and cultural diversity. She said that UNESCO was also actively working to ensure the protection of traditional languages and had a number of projects concerning the preservation of "mother tongue" and traditional languages.

Government Presentation

BELEN SAPAG (Chile) said that, this past April, her Government had announced that it planned to urgently refer legislation regarding International Labour Organization Convention 169 to the Chilean Parliament.

Indigenous Presentation

A speaker on behalf of the World Amazigh Congress drew attention to the situation of the indigenous nomadic peoples of the Sahel, including the Tuareg Mbororo and others. In that region, Governments and businesses were exploiting natural resources and depriving the people of the rights to access and manage the lands on which they had lived for thousands of years. For the Tuareg peoples, this meant that every time a new oil well was discovered, they were forced to leave their lands and seek shelter elsewhere. He called on the Forum to work with the people of that region to ensure the abolishment once and for all of all colonial and post-colonial laws. He also called for the suspension of any exploitation by State of private firms on indigenous lands without constructive agreements on benefit sharing, and for the free movement of those people on their lands.

Forum Expert Comments

OTILIA LUX DE COTI, expert from Guatemala, thanked the organizations, individuals and Governments that delivered statements, adding that she hoped there would be real commitments through those statements. In the context of lands, territories and natural resources, she said she would like to know how States and the United Nations system intervened. What economic development model did States want to promote for indigenous peoples? She had suggested many times that there be a new economic development model and that indigenous peoples be given an overview of what it would entail. In that way, indigenous peoples would be on "equal footing" with all other human beings.

* * * * *