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Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Eighth Session

8th & 9th Meetings (AM & PM)

PERMANENT FORUM, INDIGENOUS GROUPS, SEEK CHANGE IN UNITED NATIONS WORKING METHODS

TO TURN THEIR CONCERNS INTO DRIVING FORCE BEHIND, NOT JUST OBJECT OF, STRATEGIES

Agencies Strengthen Indigenous Voice in Policy-Making, But Efforts Greeted by Some as Small-Scale, Failing to Engage Indigenous as Active Agents

As representatives of United Nations agencies and funds shed light today on their respective strategies to address indigenous peoples' concerns, members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and indigenous peoples' organizations worldwide implored the United Nations to change its working methods so that indigenous peoples were the driving force behind — and not merely the object of -- those efforts.

In an in-depth, day-long dialogue, officials from the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) discussed their approaches and challenges to incorporate the goals of the historic 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Development Group's Guidelines on Indigenous Peoples' Issues into policies and programmes, and to convince key Government partners to do the same.

UNDP's Associate Administrator Ad Melkert said that, too often, indigenous peoples lacked a say in environment and energy policy-making, weakening the impact of Government programmes to conserve and sustainably use the planet's vast natural resources. But UNDP was committed to reversing that trend through adaptation to climate change initiatives, supporting up to 200 climate change risk management projects in 10 countries and helping the Equator Initiative raise the profile of more than 1,400 community-based natural resource management projects.

As part of efforts to erase gender inequality — a major concern for indigenous women -- UNDP was helping Namibia's Government enhance legal protection of San women against gender-based violence, using the goals in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a guide, Mr. Melkert said. UNDP had also partnered with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) to boost the number of indigenous peoples' holding seats in parliaments worldwide.

Deputy Director of the FAO's Gender Equity and Rural Employment Division, Eve Crowley, said her agency was working to alleviate hunger and poverty among indigenous people, improve their access to food and help forest dwellers under threat of dispossession keep their land. For example, in Nicaragua, FAO helped bolster their involvement in legislative forestry reform. FAO's Code of Conduct on Responsible Fisheries, Right to Food Guidelines and International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture were tools that indigenous peoples could use to transform their rights into realities and help Governments develop strategies that focused on vulnerable groups. Indigenous people comprised one-seventh of the world's rural poor. Creating a unit in FAO specifically for their needs, as some Forum members suggested, was a good idea.

Ms. Crowley stressed, however, that FAO, like other United Nations agencies, serviced Governments. The agency's success depended on those Governments' receptiveness to indigenous peoples' concerns and proposals to help them. Government officials and FAO staff alike were often ill-informed about the Declaration and the Guidelines, and lacked expertise on the issue -- which was still an emerging field in policy circles. They also differed over how to implement policy, with some favouring large-scale agroecological projects on indigenous peoples' lands, while others believed less invasive, small-scale agricultural approaches were appropriate.

Tonya Gonnella Frichner, a Forum member from the United States, said the FAO report submitted to the Forum gave the impression that indigenous people were presented more as beneficiaries and subjects of studies. It was unclear how the agency interacted with them as partners or active agents of cooperation. FAO's projects were small-scale, and therefore had a limited impact, she said, expressing hope that the agency had some avenues for addressing those challenges. Elisa Canqui Mollo, a Forum member from Bolivia, stressed the importance of indigenous peoples' true participation in FAO's food security efforts and the agency's funding of projects. Indigenous peoples could not commit themselves to a process until they were fully involved in and informed about it.

Turning to the issue of indigenous peoples' human rights, Antti Korkearvi, Coordinator of UNHCHR's Minority and Indigenous Peoples Unit, said the UNHCHR was using the Declaration as the key tool to protect those rights, and it had increased funding for numerous country-specific programmes that benefited indigenous people. There was no room for complacency as rights of indigenous peoples were being violated around the world. UNHCHR was developing guidelines and brochures, and, through its regional and country presences, conducting hands-on training to United Nations staff, notably in Asia and Latin America, as well as an indigenous fellowship programme. OHCHR also supported human rights treaty bodies, such as the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which had paid close attention to indigenous peoples, and the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which had referred to indigenous children in one of its general comments.

Also speaking today were observers for Denmark, Nicaragua and Bolivia.

Myanmar's representative spoke in exercise of the right of reply.

Forum members from the Philippines, Bolivia, Spain, Uganda, Norway, Morocco, and Congo also spoke.

Also making panel presentations today were Eliana Riojas de Casanova of the Confederacion Indigena de Desarrollo en Bolivia; Rebeca Grynspan, Director, UNDP Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean; and Olav Kjørven, Director, UNDP Bureau for Development Policy.

Also making remarks were the following UNDP officials: Beatriz Fernandez, Focal Point for Indigenous Peoples; Chandra Roy, Coordinator, UNDP Regional Indigenous Peoples' Programme (RIPP); Gary Conille, Team Leader, Millennium Development Goals Cluster, UNDP Bureau for Development Policy; Charles McNeill, Senior Policy Advisor, Environment and Energy Group; Terence Hay-Edie, Biodiversity Programme Officer in the UNDP-Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme; and Juan Pablo Corlazzoli, Chairman, Democratic Governance, UNDP Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Also among participants were the following organizations: Africa Women's Caucus; Asia Indigenous Caucus; Assembly of First Nations; Amazight Caucus; Consejo Indigena de Centro America (COICI); Confederation of the Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia (CSUTC); International Indian Treaty Council; Tribal Link; Feine; Forum For Indigenous Perspectives and Action (also on behalf of Asia Pacific Indigenous Youth Network); Mexican Indigenous Peoples' Organizations; Yamasi People; Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action and the Hmong Unity League.

The Forum will reconvene at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, 26 May to continue its session.

Background

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues continued its eighth annual session today in which indigenous delegations were to participate in an in-depth interactive dialogue with six United Nations agencies and funds -- part of its new working methods under item 6. Participating agencies included the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; Food and Agriculture Organization; International Fund for Development; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); United Nations Population Fund; and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Interactive Dialogue

Featured in this morning's in-depth dialogue were United Nations Development Programme presentations by Ad Melkert, Associate Administrator; Rebeca Grynspan, Director, Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean; and Olav Kjørven, Director, Bureau for Development Policy.

Launching the dialogue, Mr. MELKERT said the Forum was a reminder that the United Nations was more than just the sum of its Member States. "We the Peoples" was a promise that extended beyond the State. As such, UNDP was committed to creating space at local, regional, national and international levels for indigenous voices to be heard -- and to inform decision-making.

Too often, indigenous peoples were excluded from meaningful participation in environment and energy policymaking and such exclusion had weakened the impact of programmes implemented by national Governments. He said UNDP was committed to reversing that trend through various programmes, including an adaptation to climate change initiatives, through which the agency was supporting the development of 80 to 200 climate change risk-management projects in 10 countries.

UNDP's involvement in the Equator Initiative had helped more than 1,400 community-based natural resource management projects raise their profile. In the area of gender equality, UNDP was supporting Namibia in enhancing legal protection of San women against gender-based violence. In the area of democratic governance, the Inter-Parliamentary Union-UNDP programme was promoting indigenous representation in parliaments.

"All of this is inspired by the historic United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples", he said. In the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples, he urged matching words with decisive action. To that end, the International Labour Organization and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights were exploring the possibility of creating a global indigenous peoples' partnership, which would offer a framework to support Government programmes to strengthen legal standards contained in the Declaration.

Speaking next, Ms. GRYNSPAN highlighted a lack of knowledge about indigenous peoples' contribution to Latin America and the Caribbean, which impeded their full exercise of human rights and citizenship. To stem that tide, UNDP had taken the lead in various projects, notably the "Heroes Programme", which strengthened inter-agency working group coordination. Such work had allowed for the creation of a National Council for Dialogue in Bolivia, and similar consultation mechanisms were being replicated around the region. In March 2009, as part of a comprehensive human rights strengthening programme, UNDP launched the "Indigenous Initiative" to make best practices systemic in Latin America. Its goals were to increase dissemination of the Declaration and build capacity for projects that guaranteed a rights-based approach.

Turning to an array of other projects, she said, first, that UNDP was working to change some of its working methods to ensure that indigenous peoples were not the objects but the subjects -- the driving force -- behind programmes that affected them. In the area of economic and social development, she said the "Eficacia" initiative in Paraguay had buttressed the principle of "traditional reciprocity" and conservation of traditional territories. In the area of education, UNDP was making progress through its multilingual education programme and had gained a better understanding of how to incorporate indigenous peoples' values into those efforts. In the area of gender equality, UNDP was working in Mexico to strengthen democratic culture in indigenous districts to foster the political participation of indigenous women. Among other issues, she said UNDP continued to support Guatemala's implementation of the peace agreement. Development Councils had been developed and UNDP also promoted the Maya programme. In Peru, progress had been made in following up on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Comments and Questions

During the ensuing question-and-answer period, EUGENIO INSIGNE, a Forum member from the Philippines, speaking on behalf of all the Forum members, posed a series of questions to the UNDP panellists.

How had the Declaration and the obligations of United Nations agencies under article 41 and 42 impacted UNDP's work? What was UNDP's niche in the area of indigenous peoples' issues and in promoting their rights?

In terms of policies and procedures, how did UNDP foresee the Declaration impacting its policies and procedures, particularly concerning the principle of free, prior and informed consent and the need for local and national consultative and participatory mechanisms? How did UNDP secure implementation of free, prior and informed consent with partners at the national and local levels? What were some of the main challenges and opportunities to implementing it? How was the agency promoting and implementing the United Nations Development Group's Guidelines on Indigenous Peoples' Issues? How were indigenous people included in UNDP's strategic plan for 2008-2011? To what extent were UNDP staff aware of the UNDP Policy of Engagement with Indigenous Peoples, and how was that policy used to guide the staff's work?

Regarding specific countries and regions, was UNDP developing other regional or global programmes on indigenous issues apart from the Regional Indigenous Peoples Programme? In what countries or regions had UNDP been most effective in its work on indigenous peoples' issues, and what had been the major substantive areas of cooperation? What had been the main barriers to projects in other regions? How did UNDP help ensure that indigenous peoples' issues were incorporated into national policy processes? What was the impact of the inter-agency working groups and indigenous peoples' advisory committees in Bolivia and Kenya? Were those experiences likely to be replicated in other countries? To what extent did government agencies dedicated to indigenous peoples participate in UNDP's programmes? To what extent was UNDP involved in the programmes it funded?

Concerning internal capacity, was UNDP well-equipped to work on indigenous peoples' issues and did its staff have sufficient expertise, in that regard? What could be done to strengthen UNDP's capacity to work on indigenous issues more effectively and to increase the number of specialists? What had been the impact, so far, of the Indigenous Peoples-UNDP Liaison Committee in strengthening the capacity to better address indigenous peoples' issues at the corporate level and ensure greater synergies?

Turning to UNDP's Human Development Reports and National Millennium Development Goals Reports, what actions could be pursued to ensure that those reports better addressed indigenous peoples' issues and that indigenous people were consulted on their production?

In terms of the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD), what was UNDP's role and how did it intend to apply the principles set forth in the Declaration and the Forum's recommendations? What action was UNDP taking to ensure that indigenous people were not alienated or negatively affected by the UN-REDD Programme? Would the UN-REDD Programme Policy Board consider strategies to address the underlying causes of deforestation?

Regarding the Global Environmental Facility, what was the Small Grants Programme doing to enhance indigenous peoples' access to it? How successful was the effort to get video proposals from indigenous people? How many such proposals had been approved and how was implementation of those projects assessed? Which projects were directly financing indigenous peoples, without intermediation from non-governmental organizations? How did the implementation methodology strengthen the economic, social, cultural, political and organizational capacities of indigenous peoples? He asked for specific examples. Were there potential intellectual property issues to be dealt with in the development of appropriate mapping techniques for documenting indigenous peoples' conservation areas?

Turning to community-based adaptation, how could UNDP support indigenous peoples' efforts in community-based adaptation to climate change, and what had been the impact of lessons learned and good practices in adaptation projects? How were indigenous people participating in the three such community-based projects in Guatemala, Viet Nam and Bolivia cited in paragraph 16 of the UNDP report?

In terms of inter-agency cooperation, how could UNDP and the Forum best collaborate to develop the capacities of United Nations country teams and offices and ensure implementation of the Declaration, particularly articles 41 and 42? How was UNDP contributing to inter-agency efforts to promote indigenous peoples' rights and the mainstreaming of those rights in the United Nations system?

Presenting questions received from indigenous peoples and non-governmental organizations, he asked what UNDP was doing about housing and poor social development, in recognition of the huge effect those two areas were having on tuberculosis. What was the UNDP doing to address the situation of urban indigenous peoples?

United Nations Response

Mr. MELKERT said situations varied from country to country and that some country teams were more sensitive, informed and creative than others. He encouraged everyone in UNDP to be as responsive as possible and the meeting's participants to bring issues to UNDP's attention.

Concerning UNDP's niche, he said it was working with Member States, who were key stakeholders in the Programme's work and participants in its Executive Board. In its dialogue with Member States, UNDP tried to define the development agenda as it saw fit and organize a consensus around it. UNDP's strategic plan worked for the world's poorest, including those in indigenous communities, because their voice and participation was essential to make their ownership a reality. Governments could not be effective without involving society at large. He ensured Forum participants that they could count on UNDP to support their organizations and take into account their positions in its own decision-making. UNDP's Human Development Reports were an important part of that process.

In terms of how UNDP secured application of free, prior and informed consent, he said it could not secure those principles as it was up to Member States representatives, parliaments and other Government bodies and officials to do that. As an international organization, UNDP could not take over responsibility that was rooted in local and national communities. What it could do, however, was advise, advocate and share best practices at the country level.

Ms. GRYNSPAN, responding to the question on the impact of the inter-agency working groups and indigenous peoples' advisory committee in Bolivia, said UNDP's representative in Bolivia had chaired the committee's last meeting and was the only agency head to participate in all the committee's deliberations. At that meeting, UNDP had made a commitment to promote a permanent political dialogue with indigenous peoples' organizations in Bolivia. UNDP's Bolivia representative had met several times with those organizations' leaders to exchange information and address issues concerning constitutional reform, peaceful conflict resolution and fiscal policy reform aimed at mitigating the global financial crisis' impact on indigenous people. UNDP had also committed to address trade policies, with the aim of ensuring that they did not negatively affect indigenous people. A trade union for indigenous people had reached agreement in that regard in accordance with Bolivia's Constitution.

In terms of capacity-building, she said UNDP specialists designated to work on indigenous peoples' issues had the requisite capacity, but that other staff did not, at present. She stressed the importance of training staff, so that indigenous peoples' concerns cut across democratic governance, the Millennium Development Goals and other thematic areas. That was a major challenge for UNDP, which was working to train more people to become knowledgeable about the indigenous peoples' Declaration and how to implement it.

Regarding the Human Development Reports and the Millennium Development Goals reports, she said that best practices in Latin America concerning indigenous peoples' issues had been highlighted in those documents. Best practices in Mexico could indeed be replicated in other countries. The report entitled "Ethnicity and the Millennium Development Goals in Latin America" illustrated that while many countries in the region were making progress towards the Goals, their indigenous communities and Afro-communities were not experiencing the same gains.

BEATRIZ FERNANDEZ, UNDP's Focal Point for Indigenous Peoples, said UNDP had committed to specific programmes for different themes. UNDP was working with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) to promote indigenous peoples' representation in parliaments in Latin America. It was exploring a new global framework cooperation arrangement with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR). She hoped that the Forum would play an essential role in supporting UNDP in that process.

CHANDRA ROY, Coordinator of UNDP's Regional Indigenous Peoples' Programme (RIPP), said that four years ago UNDP had begun policy dialogues with indigenous people in Asia to give them space to discuss policy concerns with Government officials. The Forum Chairperson, who was an indigenous person from the Philippines, was on the Regional Indigenous Peoples' advisory board. The Regional Indigenous Peoples' Programme was involved in training and capacity-building projects, through which it sought to incorporate a human rights-based approach to development. In terms of the extent of participation of government agencies dedicated to indigenous peoples' issues in UNDP programmes, she pointed to the work of the Forum member from the Philippines, Eugenio Insigne, who was also Chairperson of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples.

GARY CONILLE, Team Leader, Millennium Development Goals Cluster, UNDP Bureau for Development Policy, said the first concern for UNDP was to try to make data available. Approximately 85 per cent of the Millennium Development Goals data requested was available. The figure was just 65 per cent for Africa. UNDP headquarters partnered with UNDP country offices to obtain as much data as possible and to ensure that reports included guidelines for gathering information on indigenous peoples. Many countries had built national development plans taking into account that disaggregated data.

Responding to other questions, Mr. CHARLES MCNEILL, Senior Policy Advisor, Environment and Energy Group, UNDP, discussed the UNDP Reducing Emissions from Deforestation in Developing Countries Programme, saying that indigenous peoples suffered most from climate change impacts and forest loss. Everything must be done to stop that. UNDP was working with FAO, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and others to implement the Programme in nine pilot countries. UNDP's job was to ensure that indigenous peoples were involved and that the Programme was, indeed, pro-poor.

He said UNDP had paid close attention to last year's recommendations and, as a result, the principle of free, prior and informed consent was built into emissions reduction Programme guidelines. Policy reforms were needed for the programme to work, and he highlighted various actions already taken, including the creation of indigenous peoples' guidelines in three languages. Consultations would be held next Wednesday to get indigenous groups' advice on them. Also, UNDP was calling for adherence to the Declaration and involving indigenous peoples in national steering committees to that effect. One important development had been the decision to include indigenous peoples on the board of the emissions reduction Programme, which included decisions concerning the Programme's development.

Comments and Questions

In the ensuing round of questions and comments, a representative of the Africa Women's Caucus said that, in most African States, indigenous peoples did not have the ability to lobby to ensure respect for their rights. What did the United Nations expect from countries vis-à-vis ensuring indigenous peoples' involvement?

A delegate from the Asia Indigenous Caucus wondered how UNDP could help create monitoring mechanisms for implementation of the principle of free, prior and informed consent. Did UNDP plan to increase funds for Asia, and could it provide financial support for indigenous institutions?

ANDERS BALTZER JORGENSEN, observer for Denmark, referring to a UNDP report, said he noticed no reference to mainstreaming indigenous peoples into UNDP programmes, and he asked if UNDP planned to do so. Also, UNDP had no agency strategy to incorporate an indigenous perspective, and he asked if there was a plan to develop one. How did the Programme plan to build capacity in its offices? Finally, how would UNDP involve itself in the process of free, prior and informed consent, given its importance?

STEDMAN FAGOTH, observer for Nicaragua, also asked how UNDP was incorporating indigenous peoples' rights into its programmes, and said UNDP should put more efforts towards working with Governments and peoples impacted by Hurricane Felix.

ELISA CANQUI MOLLO, Forum member from Bolivia, asked if UNDP would change its working methodology.

BARTOLOMÉ CLAVERO SALVADOR, Forum member from Spain, focused on the need for regional programming in Latin America. To the idea of using existing programmes as examples, he urged, in such thinking, "please don't" use Bolivia's programme. The Bolivian Council was not working. There had been serious events recently and the Council had not even met. How did UNDP check to ensure that programmes were actually working, as its report had claimed?

MARGARET LOKAWUA, Forum member from Uganda, asked about UNDP's grass-roots involvement in Africa. In Uganda, for example, UNDP did not deal directly with indigenous peoples – how did it ensure engagement now that the Declaration was in place?

CARSTEN SMITH, Forum member from Norway, noting that the Declaration was a superior law for the Forum, asked what its position was in UNDP's overall strategy. Did the agency have any views about its binding effect?

United Nations Response

Responding, Mr. MELKERT said it was important to mainstream indigenous peoples' participation at all relevant stages of any development process. To the question about UNDP's grass-roots involvement, he said the Programme was a close partner with Governments in support of development processes, urging that indigenous peoples be respected in those from the start. In that work, UNDP could help ensure that best practices were generally accessible and create reports that built on them. In addition, UNDP stood by to ensure that institutions were functioning well. The idea to have independent monitoring mechanisms should be looked at on a country-by-country basis to ensure that follow-up was being undertaken in implementation processes.

To a question from Denmark's delegate, he said UNDP was committed to supporting United Nations country teams and UNDP country offices to ensure that there was adequate representation of indigenous issues in their strategies. At the same time, UNDP dealt with many demands and policies simultaneously and was working with scarce resources.

Addressing questions on Latin America, Ms. GRYNSPAN focused first on UNDP's working methods, saying that the agency had had to change its programmes to incorporate indigenous perspectives. "Not everything that needs to be done has been done," she stressed. However, UNDP was organizing workshops to raise the awareness of all regional offices. Also, tackling cultural issues could not be brought about by a "decree on high" -- it involved raising awareness among indigenous groups. As far as Bolivia was concerned, she conceded that for more than a year, UNDP had been without a representative in Bolivia and, as such, the National Council for Dialogue had been inactive for a while. She urged investigating whether that mechanism would work in the future.

Responding to a query about UNDP's direct access to indigenous peoples, TERENCE HAY-EDIE, Biodiversity Programme Officer in the UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme, highlighted that programme's presence in several Latin American countries, including in Argentina and Panama, where work had begun three years ago. The Small Grants Programme would soon start in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic. Regarding the UNDP community-based climate change adaptation programme, UNDP was supporting risk-management projects in 10 countries. The agency also recognized the importance of traditional knowledge systems and urged support for it in the future. Questions on UNDP's work in Guatemala, Viet Nam and Bolivia would be addressed in a written statement.

Speaking next, JUAN PABLO CORLAZZOLI, Chairman, Democratic Governance, UNDP Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, addressed a query on staff in Guatemala. He said one person was responsible for six major projects, one of which focused on strengthening indigenous and rural organizations. Another aimed to ensure that indigenous peoples participated politically in the Declaration's implementation, especially in the context of the country's peace agreement. However, some sought to change culture along "pluralistic" lines. To address that, he discussed a 2007 document on the "Mayan vision" geared to help those with a Western outlook better understand how to incorporate that vision into work on the ground. He also highlighted UNDP's role in peaceful dispute settlement and support for autonomous communities. Finally, to the suggestion to create a regional programme, he said a regional initiative, launched in March, sought to make best practices systematic. The outcome of that might be a regional programme.

EVE CROWLEY, Deputy Director, Gender Equity and Rural Employment Division, Food and Agriculture Organization, said that "to preserve biodiversity, one has to preserve cultural diversity". With that, she gave an overview of FAO's work with indigenous peoples, saying that FAO's engagement with them was carried out in three main ways. Describing its field programme, she said FAO worked along broad themes, the biggest of which was food security, as its goal was to alleviate hunger and poverty. In the area of nutrition -- its second theme -- FAO focused on improving quality and access to food. The third theme of natural resource management focused on building capacities of forest dwellers, which faced the prospect of land dispossession. In Nicaragua, for example, FAO helped to increase their involvement in the revision of forest legislation. Under its fourth theme -- enhancing traditional agricultural systems -- efforts were trained on maintaining such systems for the benefit of world environmental heritage.

Joining Ms. Crowley was ELIANA RIOJAS DE CASANOVA of the Confederacion Indigena de Desarrollo en Bolivia, who presented an indigenous view on FAO's work. She focused on an FAO communication platform created to strengthen information exchange among various indigenous groups across Latin America, notably in their efforts for self-determination in preserving traditional lands. In that work, international meetings had been held in which local organizations had highlighted the importance of knowledge-sharing about their communication experiences. Virtual regional meetings also had been organized in an effort to enrich the content of communication. Further, the confederation had attended the 2008 High-Level Conference on World Food Security in Rome and had also presented their ideas at the Forum's sixth and seventh sessions. As for the way forward, she noted the need for a system to monitor best communications practices. She also called for an alliance among the world's regions to ensure that "communication and self-determination are high on the international agenda".

Resuming her presentation, Ms. Crowley said research and knowledge generation formed the second major area of FAO's work, and various research studies focusing on indigenous peoples had been carried out. Its third area was in policy-level work, and it helped form national plans for rural development and poverty alleviation. FAO's Code of Conduct on Responsible Fisheries, Right to Food Guidelines and International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture were all tools that indigenous peoples could use to transform their rights into realities and help Governments develop strategies that focused on vulnerable groups. At the same time, she clarified that FAO's main clients were Governments -- it did not have a clear mandate on indigenous issues. When Governments were not receptive to indigenous peoples, FAO was somewhat limited as to what it could do.

Comments and Questions

TONYA GONNELLA FRICHER, Forum member from the United States, speaking on behalf of the Forum, said that while the FAO report was quite candid regarding the Agency's challenges to interacting with indigenous peoples, she hoped that the dialogue would present some possible avenues for addressing those challenges. The report gave the impression that indigenous people were presented more as beneficiaries and subjects of studies. It was unclear how the FAO interacted with them as partners or active agents of cooperation. As the work was not systematic and projects were small-scale, they therefore had a limited impact. She expressed hope that the FAO had some avenues for addressing those challenges.

She noted that paragraph 15 of the report referred to specific interventions for adapting to and mitigating climate change, including integration of ecosystems and adaptation to climate change in the Colombian Massif. FAO should also look at disasters in North America, such as wildfires in southern California, which were also directly related to climate change and human usage and had affected indigenous people disproportionately. For example, wildfires had completely destroyed more than 90 per cent of the buildings on the La Jolla Reservation in southern California. That and other situations in North America needed attention from United Nations agencies.

What was FAO's role in UN-REDD and how did FAO intend to apply the principles set forth in the Declaration and the Forum's recommendations in that regard? What action was FAO taking to ensure that indigenous people were not alienated and negatively affected by UN-REDD? UN-REDD was implemented in Bolivia. Were there plans to install it in other Latin American countries? She called on FAO to do so.

In terms of communications initiatives, she asked how FAO intended to follow up its work on communications for indigenous people and to create monitoring mechanisms on their right to communication. What strategic partnerships or other collaborative mechanisms did it envision ensuring the success and sustainability of that process and the active participation of indigenous peoples?

She also wanted to know FAO's position in terms of food sovereignty, the right to food, food security, land and resources, and how it was applying the Declaration to protect indigenous peoples' land, resources and human rights. Also, did FAO have any activities that utilized indigenous peoples' knowledge, such as their knowledge of irrigation systems in Peru and Bolivia?

Ms. CANQUI MOLLO, Forum member from Bolivia, stressed the need to think beyond adoption of the Declaration to policy. She asked what challenges FAO was facing to ensure indigenous peoples' issues were mainstreamed throughout the organization's mandate. What was FAO's approach to that, and how could indigenous people help the agency in that process? What were the challenges for FAO to implementing the principles of free, prior and informed consent?

Now that the Declaration had been adopted, she said that new processes and a new operational framework focused on indigenous peoples must be launched. What impact had the Declaration had on new FAO programmes? Was FAO still waiting for policies to be developed to start work? Were the examples FAO had given during its screen presentation already the basis for new projects?

Noting that paragraph 20 of page 8 of the report refers to FAO studies on food sovereignty and food security for indigenous communities, she asked how those studies had changed the design of FAO projects. Also, had FAO responded to the demands of indigenous people? Were indigenous people just supplying FAO with information for the studies, or were they truly participating in the process of working towards food security? How many indigenous people were members of FAO's staff? If there were none, had FAO at least worked with indigenous peoples' consultants on project execution?

Responding to those queries, Ms. CROWLEY said FAO was trying to be a neutral specialized agency that encouraged Governments to engage with indigenous peoples in public policy formulation.

To a question on North America, she said that in an organization that was being encouraged to cut back and to emphasize its key mandate -- food security -- the tendency had been to focus more on

developing countries, specifically low-income developing countries. She noted international instruments, such as the Rotterdam Convention, the Right to Food Guidelines and Codex Alimentarius, were used in developed and developing countries. FAO was working to monitor how pests and diseases were transferred and it had developed cutting-edge work on influenza A (H1N1).

To a question on the UN-REDD programme, she said FAO's role was of a technical nature -- in measurement, assessment reporting and verification work, helping to establish a baseline on the status of forests over the last 30 years; and in conducting a best practices study. FAO's participation was also seen in the draft operational guidelines used to engage indigenous communities, which focused on three areas: representation, transparency and access to information, and participation and inclusion.

Turning to whether communication initiatives would be expanded, Ms. RIOJAS said that through the communications platform in Latin America the Forum could better connect with indigenous groups. It was important to position indigenous peoples and achieve a common voice.

She said that, for FAO, "land is food", and access to that land was critical to indigenous peoples' identity and survival. An innovative example was seen in Angola with FAO's effort to support the delimitation of customary territories. A set of principles had emerged from that experience, and she asked for indigenous peoples' views on them.

Comments and Questions

In the next round of comments and questions, indigenous delegates focused on food security, highlighting the need for policies that reflected the real needs of people living in rural areas. In one such comment, a delegate asked how FAO was addressing the "North-South" question in indigenous rural areas, or challenges to the human right to water.

A representative of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Caucus questioned the seeming reluctance of FAO to listen to grass-roots movements in international forums on food. She asked the FAO to ensure respect for the Declaration, support small-scale agriculture, and establish partnerships with indigenous peoples for the development of food security programmes.

Government delegates outlined national initiatives to build the productive capacities of indigenous peoples. One speaker congratulated FAO for its honest description of the realistic constraints in dealing with indigenous issues and pressed it for ideas on how those could be reversed. In addition, he noted that the words "pastoralists and pastoralism" had not been used in the FAO report and said the organization should support their livelihoods. He also asked how FAO would apply the concept of free, prior and informed in areas with indigenous populations.

Also contributing to the discussion were Forum members, who both received questions from indigenous delegates and posed them to FAO representatives. One comment focused on whether the Forum could inform United Nations agencies, including the Security Council, of the critical threats to indigenous peoples worldwide.

CARLOS MAMANI CONDORI, Forum member from Bolivia, said FAO was doing interesting work in the area of food security and climate change. It was an important focus, as it could have a "knock on" effect elsewhere. He asked whether FAO could more resolutely support indigenous lands and territories, as they were jeopardized by extractive and other industries, making food security more difficult. Also, could FAO work directly with traditional Governments? In his village, for example, FAO worked with indigenous partners, and he asked whether that could be replicated elsewhere.

HAASSAN ID BALKASSM, Forum Member from Morocco, urged FAO to protect indigenous peoples' rights to food security at a realistic wide-ranging level. He said several international agencies put mega-projects on indigenous lands. Organizations, including FAO, should create a division dedicated to international indigenous peoples.

United Nations Response

In terms of what was needed to implement policies for indigenous people and the Declaration, Ms. CROWLEY said that as a United Nations agency, FAO responded to its member Governments. It responded specifically to Government Ministries of Forestry, Fisheries and Land. She called on the Forum members and indigenous people to help FAO ensure that Governments were informed about the Declaration. The second constraint for FAO was the lack of awareness among its staff and Governments about the Declaration and the Guidelines. FAO was trying to conduct training on both in its offices. During the training in Guatemala, only one staff member had been familiar with the Guidelines, while none in Nicaragua and Honduras were, including those that were members of indigenous peoples' organizations.

She welcomed the comments on policy, but warned that there was still a risk that policies still had to be cleared or approved by Governments. She called on the participants to help ensure approval. She took note of the issue that some projects and programmes supported by FAO emphasized intensification. But there were different schools of thought in FAO. One supported intense approaches, but the other considered low-input agroecological approaches to be more appropriate for indigenous communities. The latter was the approach that had resounded more solidly. She took note of the importance of small-scale traditional farming.

There had been many changes recently in FAO's management structure, connected to the United Nations management reform process, she noted. A world food summit in June should include an indigenous peoples' forum. In terms of the petition to the Anchorage Declaration, she said having an indigenous people's focal point to help channel and coordinate inputs was a good suggestion, with a view to expanding that in the long run to include not just climate change issues, but also an indigenous peoples' reference group for FAO.

Concerning pastoralism, she said FAO had many partnerships, particularly in parts of Asia, where it was working to support Farmer Field School approaches and raise sensitivity along the value chain, she said. Animal genetics work could not be done without the involvement of animal pastoralists.

Regarding how FAO implemented the principle of free, prior and informed consent, she said it had used it successfully in some cases. Research on indigenous peoples' food systems had been done in conformity with those principles in some areas in the Pacific. The code of conduct for responsible fisheries had been translated into eight local languages. Still, there was a long way to go, as the code was not being implemented consistently.

In terms of land rights, she said FAO's key partners were Governments and that it depended on their willingness to ensure those rights. In some African countries, good tax systems were in place that actually favoured land rights of small groups over those of large property holders.

Concerning creation of an indigenous peoples' unit in FAO, she said indeed that was a good idea and that she welcomed the Forum's views on how to create it. One-seventh of the world's rural poor were indigenous people. That was not an insignificant percentage, and their rights must be addressed.

Comments and Questions

Ms. GONNELLA thanked FAO for its very comprehensive report. She would have liked to have time to discuss the UN-REDD and the impact of transnational industries on indigenous communities. She lauded Ms. Crowley's statement that land was food, as that concept was key to indigenous peoples' identity. There must be further discussion on genetically-modified organisms and food. She supported the proposal to create a unit in FAO for indigenous peoples' issues and called on Governments to support that. She also endorsed FAO's support for holding a world summit on indigenous peoples in 2010.

Ms. CANQUI MOLLO said indigenous peoples could not commit themselves to a process until they were fully involved in and informed about it. Funding of indigenous peoples' projects should be coordinated with indigenous peoples' organizations and representatives.

ANTTI KORKEARVI, Coordinator of the Minority and Indigenous Peoples Unit of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, said the Office supported a range of human rights treaty bodies and had implemented numerous country-specific programmes that benefited indigenous peoples. At the same time, it was committed to making its work stronger, and this year, had increased resources devoted to protection of indigenous peoples.

"There is no scope for complacency here -- the human rights of indigenous peoples are being violated around the world," he said, adding that all must ensure that the Declaration's adoption yielded concrete results. Since its passage, the document had become a key tool for the High Commissioner in the protection of indigenous peoples. His report to the eighth session had focused on that.

Highlighting a few issues in that report, he said the High Commissioner's Office was playing an important role in developing guidelines and brochures and in translating documents into indigenous languages. Through its regional and country presences, it was providing hands-on training to United Nations staff, notably in Asia and Latin America. More such work was needed. It was often carried out with partner agencies, including UNDP and ILO, with input from the Forum.

Regarding the human rights treaty bodies, he said the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination had paid close attention to indigenous peoples, while the Committee on the Rights of the Child had referred to indigenous children in one of its general comments. It also had contributed to a law relating to indigenous peoples in the Congo. To raise the Declaration's profile, the High Commissioner's Office had organized an event in the context of the Durban Review Conference and had partnered with UNDP to organize a regional dialogue in Bangkok.

Turning to new mechanisms within the United Nations human rights framework, he cited, among the significant institutional developments, the launch of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a subsidiary body of the Human Rights Council. Currently, it was working on its first thematic study on indigenous peoples' right to education, which would be submitted to the Council later this year.

He said the Office was also committed to facilitating excellent cooperation with the Forum, as seen in a recent joint statement welcoming Australia's endorsement of the Declaration. In December 2008, the Office had organized an international workshop entitled "natural resource companies, indigenous peoples and human rights: setting a framework for consultation, benefit-sharing and dispute resolution", held in Moscow, with a view to producing guidelines. Another way the Office interacted with the Forum was through the Voluntary Fund, which provided travel grants for attendance at the Forum and the Expert Mechanism.

Finally, he said that the High Commissioner's Office sought to ensure that its own capacity-building efforts involved indigenous peoples. Its indigenous fellowship programme had resulted in a wide alumni network, which now provided guidance, for example, in the selection of new indigenous fellows.

Comments and Questions

Mr. CLAVERO said UNHCHR's written and verbal report covered many issues and answered many questions. In the era of the Declaration, emphasis should be placed on indigenous peoples. How could their participation be boosted? Was the practice of appointing indigenous experts to the indigenous panels going to be consolidated? How could participation be bolstered in the Expert Mechanism? Was there a standard method in the UNHCHR to pass on all the information it received on indigenous peoples to other United Nations human rights instruments? To what extent were United Nations human rights and treaty bodies kept abreast of developments concerning indigenous peoples, including the Declaration? The Committee on the Rights of the Child had adopted a new stance on indigenous people. How could it be ensured that other human rights instruments did the same?

Did UNHCHR intend to strengthen the secretariat of the Expert Mechanism, the Special Rapporteur, the Forum and other human rights offices? What new ways could the UNHCHR offer to raise awareness about new developments in the United Nations system across the board? UNHCHR's website was not user-friendly; it was difficult to find documentation provided by the Special Rapporteur. How could one ensure that the Special Rapporteur's documentation, such as on his recent visit to Chile, was published on the website as practical, logistical details were very important. How could UNHCHR make the rights of indigenous peoples more visible across the United Nations system? Had UNHCHR considered creating an office for indigenous peoples? If not, why not?

LILIANE MUZANGI, Forum member from Congo, pointed to the major vulnerabilities of indigenous women, many of whom were subjected to unconscionable violence. What was being done to ensure that those acts did not go unpunished?

Mr. SMITH asked if the Forum could have a partnership with the UNHCHR when raising direct questions to States. Also, how much of UNHCHR's resources were used on issues of concern to indigenous peoples?

Mr. KORKEARVI, responding first to a query on accessing information on the Office of the High Commissioner's website, said the Office was reviewing how to better access the information and there would likely be a substantial website reform. That was also partially linked to the question of resources. As to whether more resources could be provided to the Expert Mechanism and the Special Rapporteur, he said the Office had expanded greatly in the field.

Regarding the size of his Unit, he said that there were 10 staff members. Creating a specific unit devoted to indigenous issues would result in a big imbalance. However, it was right to point out differences in the work carried out for minority issues and that for indigenous issues. There were other thematic units that could be of use to the Forum's work, for example, that dealing with the rule of law, which had various projects addressing impunity and broader rule of law questions. Other mechanisms and treaty bodies could also be used more actively by indigenous peoples.

Concerning a mechanism for processing specific human rights complaints, he said his unit did not have a mandate as such, but it could ensure that complaints were addressed to bodies with the appropriate mandate -- the Human Rights Committee, for example. His office could perhaps facilitate a hands-on training on various complaint processes as an addition to the Forum's sessions. Also, perhaps, thematic concerns could be addressed jointly through thematic activities. The Office had briefed representatives of treaty bodies on the Declaration, but it was a "young instrument" and there was more to be done in that regard.

Addressing a query on the enhancement of indigenous peoples' participation in various mechanisms and bodies, he cited the Expert Mechanism as an example of where that had been done. It was extremely important that indigenous participation be taken into account in human rights bodies. His Office was trying to build the capacity that opened those doors and gave indigenous representatives the skills, knowledge and contacts that would make it possible for them to have a seat in such bodies. The Office's fellowship programme lasted for four months and trained young leaders in the "ins and outs" of human rights mechanisms such as the universal periodic review process, he replied to another question. It was also an example of excellent inter-agency cooperation. As for the Voluntary Fund, the more than 1,000 people who had received a grant would be included in a database.

Comments and Questions

In the next round of comments and questions, indigenous speakers pressed the Office of the High Commissioner to urge Governments to implement the Declaration, particularly as there were numerous cases -- notably in Canada, India, Morocco and Mexico -- where human rights were routinely ignored. Further, how could the Declaration be integrated into the policy framework of United Nations treaty monitoring bodies? Other speakers focused on how the High Commissioner's Office could proactively engage with national institutions. As Asia was the only region that lacked a

human rights monitoring mechanism, would the Office consider a presence in countries or regions that lacked such activities or in which human rights violations had been on the rise?

Related to those queries were others about how the High Commissioner's Office could address impunity and act more decisively to bring human rights violators to justice. One speaker asked what could be done about three women who had disappeared in Mexico, while another wondered about 10 flag-bearing Amazight people accosted yesterday at a Morocco music festival and several young displaced persons who needed refugee status to continue their studies. Another delegate asked about the possibility of a human rights complaint desk at the Forum.

A delegate from the Assembly of First Nations spoke about the right to adequate housing, underscoring that 425 Algonquins were living without water, sanitation or electricity. That was disturbing, and he urged the High Commissioner's Office to address the issue.

Bolivia's observer highlighted a recent massacre about which the High Commissioner's Office had spoken out. The goal of that attack had been to kill the President and Vice President. In that context, he reiterated that his Government's intention to continue defending the rights of indigenous peoples.

A representative of the Hmong Unity League began his intervention by saying he was originally from Burma.

In a point of order, the observer for Myanmar asked him to refer to the country by its official name, which was Myanmar.

Resuming, the Hmong Unity League delegate explained that in Myanmar, 40 per cent of the population was comprised of indigenous people. Yet, there were problems with the human rights institutions in his country. Democratization was deadlocked because Aung San Suu Kyi had been arrested. Indigenous peoples, including the Shan, were focused on their right to self-determination -- they had no rights. The current Myanmar military Government did not guarantee their rights. He asked whether a special rapporteur on human rights could visit his country, even though he would have no mandate to visit ethnic areas. He also asked the High Commissioner's Office whether there was a mechanism to enforce human rights principles in Myanmar. He requested help in facilitating consultation with the Government regarding human rights violations. "We hungrily need protection," he said, to a burst of applause.

Right of Reply

Speaking in exercise of the right of reply, the observer for Myanmar said the assertion that Myanmar's constitution did not outline rights for indigenous peoples was different from reality. He wished to clarify that discrepancy. About 95 per cent of former indigenous armed groups -- more than 100,000 people -- were working with the Government and were part of the national political process. If the Government was indeed abusing rights, how could all those former insurgent groups participate in that process?

Mr. BALKASSM, Forum member from Morocco, asked Mr. Korkearvi if there were new developments related to the Office's budgets and whether allocations could be channelled to the Fund. He urged that more allocations be made. In addition, the Expert Mechanism's role was limited in terms of submitting studies.

Responding, Mr. KORKEARVI said national institutions were extremely important in addressing human rights generally and indigenous rights specifically. The High Commissioner's Office did not have a presence in all countries in which human rights violations were taking place. It would not be able to cover all countries, at least, not in the immediate future, which made it all the more important to work with national institutions.

As for violations of housing rights, he emphasized it was an issue on which the Office had been working in partnership with UN-Habitat. Regarding extrajudicial killings, there was a Special

Rapporteur on that issue who could address allegations related to the extractive industries. As for indigenous migrants, that was considered an important issue generally, and it was essential to keep the indigenous perspective in the broad picture.

In terms of enhancing recruitment opportunities within the High Commissioner's Office, he said there was indigenous staff in the Office, but that issue merited more attention. An ILO study would be carried out on the employment obstacles for indigenous peoples. The next step would be to remove those obstacles.

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