

24 April 2008



Economic and Social Council

United Nations

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

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

HR/4948

6th & 7th Meetings (AM & PM)

PERMANENT FORUM SPEAKERS SAY VIOLATION OF LANGUAGE RIGHTS 'CULTURAL GENOCIDE'

CALL FOR CONCRETE PUBLIC POLICY TO PROTECT INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Language rights should be implemented as a collective and individual right since they were integral to self-determination, a member of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues said today during a half-day debate devoted to indigenous languages.

Implementation of language rights must be viewed from a holistic perspective, Lars Anders Baer, the Forum member from Sweden, continued, saying it could not be enjoyed in the absence of other human rights. Some States were promoting the use of indigenous languages, but programmes were under-funded. He called for the drafting of a convention to protect indigenous languages, identities and cultural rights and for the creation of an authoritative body on the matter. A special rapporteur on language rights and a commissioner on "language discrimination" should be named. He added that violation of language rights was a form of cultural genocide and the Forum should consider appropriate action.

Other speakers also made the connection between loss of language and loss of culture. A second panellist, Richard Grounds, Director of the Euchee Language Project said the boarding school system forced on Native Americans had caused a kind of physical and cultural "genocide".

Similarly, the President of the Saami Parliament of Finland, Klemetti Näkkäläjärvi, said research indicated that language influenced the way people thought and was a tool for thinking. It was not only a means of communication, but a specialized part of culture and a window into the people's relationship with nature. Death of a language meant unique knowledge stored in that language disappeared, along with the capacity to function and adapt to global, social and environmental changes.

Mexico's representative called for a world conference on linguistic diversity. As a member of Mexico's National Commission on Indigenous people, Mexico's delegate said her country had reformed its legislation to strengthen the legal basis for the linguistic rights of its indigenous peoples and bilingual speakers provided services to people. A catalogue of the official indigenous languages had been published and an advisory council established to facilitate the introduction of indigenous languages into official processes. Work was proceeding on revamping the educational machinery to develop the best models on how to teach indigenous languages.

Another panellist, Rochelle Roca-Hachem, Programme Specialist for Culture, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), said languages had been gaining in importance in the past few years. Concern for linguistic diversity and multilingualism was growing. There was evidence of a growing awareness of how important language was at the international level. Under the pressure of accelerating globalization, languages and their complex implications had strategic importance in terms of identity and social integration at both global and local levels.

A member of the Youth Caucus said the importance of traditional knowledge was dismissed if the erosion of languages was allowed. He called for elders to work with youth on programmes to keep languages alive and revitalize multilingualism. He said States should affirm the validity of multi-

languages among their people and should implement measures to promote the use of multiple languages in their societies.

Also today, at its morning session, the Forum held a debate on implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and continued debate on global climate change. Delegates described how indigenous communities lagged behind in virtually all aspects of development. They also called for stronger measures and more vigorous monitoring if indigenous peoples were to even be a part of the Millennium Development Goals.

Speaking on the subject of climate change were Member State representatives of Nicaragua, Japan, Russian Federation, Mexico and Colombia. The President of the Saami Parliament also spoke on the issue, as did a delegate of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

The Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on the right to education, Vernon Munoz, introduced the topic of implementing development goals. He said poverty was a great impediment to education, since many children had to work six or more hours every day.

Also speaking on that issue were the Executive Secretary, Ministry of Indigenous Issues, Ecuador; Deputy Secretary, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Australia; Director General, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Health Canada; a member of the National Planning Commission of Nepal; and a senator from Bolivia.

A representative of Colombia also spoke on the issue, as did representatives of the Khmer Kampuchea Krom Federation; IPACC; Amazon Basin; Native Women's Association of Canada; Indigenous Network on Economics and Trade; Mohawk of Kanawake; and BC First Nation Leadership.

Further addressing the topic were the Chief Technical Adviser, Programme to promote ILO Convention 169, International Labour Organization (ILO); the Executive Secretary, Global Stop Tuberculosis Partnership, World Health Organization; and Human Rights Adviser for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

The panel on linguistic rights was comprised of Lars Anders Baer, member of the Permanent Forum from Sweden; Lourdes Tiban, Secretaria Ejecutiva Nacional (Executive Secretary), Consejo de Desarrollo de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos del Ecuador; Rochelle Roca-Hachem, Programme Specialist for Culture, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); Anna Lucia D'Emilio, Senior Adviser, Education and Excluded Population, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office; and Richard Grounds, Director, Euchee Language Project.

Also speaking on linguistic rights were the Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth, of the Government of Nunavut in Canada; the Director General, Aboriginal Affairs Branch, Heritage Canada; an official from the Ministry of Māori Development, New Zealand; an official from the Ministry of Culture and Sport of Guatemala; an official from the National Commission on Indigenous People, Mexico; and a Danish Member of Parliament.

A representative of the Russian Federation spoke on linguistic rights, as did the Grand Chief of the North American Regional Caucus and a Parliamentarian of the Parlamento Indígena de America.

Others speaking on that matter were the representatives of the Global Indigenous Women's Caucus; Asia Indigenous Caucus; Arctic Caucus; Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People; Indigenous Parliament of Bolivia; and Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, Innu Nation, Institut Culturel Educatif Montagnais.

The Permanent Forum will meet again at 10 a.m. Monday, 28 April.

Background

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues continued its seventh annual session today, with a focus on: climate change; implementation of recommendations on the six mandated areas of the Permanent Forum and on the Millennium Development Goals (economic and social development, environment, health, education, culture and human rights); and indigenous languages. (For background, see Press Releases [HR/4943](#) issued 18 April and [HR/4944](#) issued 21 April.)

Dialogue with Governments

LLOYD BUSHEY ([Nicaragua](#)), a member of the indigenous Mesquite tribe, said his people had always lived in harmony with Earth. Plundering by invaders had led to climate change. How did that affect indigenous peoples? The industrialized countries had caused the changes that had impacted the Earth in a way that led to extreme poverty. Above and beyond celebrating the significant step of getting the Declaration adopted after 20 years of negotiation, there was the question of how to implement it. The States of his region had submitted and would continue to submit resolutions in the General Assembly that would form the basis for implementation at the legislative level.

At the national level, he said an office had been set up to monitor implementation and bridge the gap between people that had resulted from the savage destruction of the natural balance between indigenous peoples and the Earth. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals, however, was impaired by certain policies. The Heads of Government in the region would be meeting in a few days to address the question of food security. Protection of the earth would be taken into consideration, with an emphasis on organic solutions and practices. The international community should show leadership in helping the region's indigenous peoples preserve the environment the imperialistic people had damaged. Capitalism must give way to a more cooperative relationship between humanity and Mother Earth.

TAKASHI ASHIKI ([Japan](#)) said since the effects of climate change were already beginning to be apparent, prompt and worldwide action was needed. Choosing climate change as a special theme had been an appropriate choice for the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. But, if the world was to make headway on the issue, it must create an international scheme that would apply after the year 2013, and one in which all major emitting countries would participate. It was for that reason that Japan announced "Cool Earth 50" and the "Cool Earth Promotion Programme" as effective contributions to the establishment of such a scheme. In July, when it would go on to host the Hokkaido Toyako Summit, the Government hoped and expected to achieve an outcome to promote negotiations on a framework for the world in the years following 2013.

ROMAN KASHAEV ([Russian Federation](#)) said global climate change had brought about various socio-economic changes to the peoples of the far north, since their economic activities were closely connected to Arctic ecology. Given adequate international support, some indigenous peoples were able to continue living normally. But, Governments of the Arctic region needed to be more conscientious when preparing sustainable development strategies, to promote ecologically rational uses of Arctic resources.

He said current research under way in Russia, undertaken as part of the International Polar Year, focused on the impact of climate change on indigenous peoples. An important goal of that research was to improve people's living conditions in the north, and to better understand its impact on health. In 2006, the federal Government released its prognosis on climate change for 2010-2015, pinpointing means for adapting to forthcoming changes to the climate. Work was also under way to prepare a draft "climate doctrine" for the Russian Federation, and the first assessment on the impacts of climate change on the country would be ready soon. He urged the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to work closely with other intergovernmental organizations to orientate their work towards indigenous issues and to avoid overlap. The Forum should participate more in climate-related plans emanating from the Nairobi meetings. It should also lend support to scientific research being conducted on the effects of climate change on indigenous peoples.

KLEMTTI NAKKALAJARVI, President, [Saami Parliament](#), said indigenous peoples paid a heavy toll for decisions made by the Western world -- they lost the basis for their cultures. The capacity of the Saami to tackle the challenges of climate change was limited if the Government did not give them enough power to act, even if, like many other indigenous peoples, they had adapted

successfully to changes to the climate over the years. So far, they had been treated mostly as objects, rather than subjects.

He pointed to the existence of internationally agreed documents that could enable more effective participation of indigenous peoples, including the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. He urged all nations to implement the commitments they had made in those documents. A “new politics” was needed at the international level, along with additional resources, to enable the world to move forward on the issue.

CLAUDIA BLUM (Colombia) said her country continued to implement policies that protected the indigenous peoples, who made up 3.4 per cent of the population and had property rights over 29.8 per cent of the national territory. They were fully equal to others in the society and were accorded full constitutional rights. The Government continued to expand the scope of protections for their lands and ways of life. The Government also accorded great importance to the question of climate change and its effect on crops and the environment, which impacted greatly on the indigenous peoples, who had made a great contribution to adapting to changing conditions with their traditional ways. As far as mitigation was concerned, she said the principle of shared but differentiated responsibility should apply, based on the assumption that industrialized countries had caused the current conditions and that indigenous peoples had not contributed to the damage.

She said her country continued to introduce projects to promote conservation and reduce dependence on fuel by encouraging the broader use of biofuels. “There is no deforestation and there never will be in Colombia,” she said. However, the illegal drug trade had destroyed much of the jungle. The eradication of drugs was a matter of policy. Energy and environmental promotion were part of the strategy. The Forum should recognize the importance of harnessing the synergy of the various United Nations forums to promote the welfare of indigenous peoples. For example, it should harmonize its efforts with those devoted to implementing the Convention on Biodiversity.

SIMON LEGRAND, representative of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), said his organization contributed to preserving the environment and promoting the welfare of the world’s indigenous peoples. A WIPO Committee on traditional practices had been established for the exchange of information on local approaches to preserving cultures and practices. A voluntary fund had been established in 2005 to enable the participation of representatives of indigenous peoples. The next exchange of views would be held from 13 to 17 October. Switzerland, Norway, France and South Africa were major contributors, as were non-governmental organizations, such as SwedBIO/CBM and the Christensen Fund.

BARTOLOMÉ CLAVERO, member of the Permanent Forum from Spain, asked the representative of Colombia if her Government would continue to ignore the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, noting that the Government had not voted in favour of it. He recalled her statement at today’s meeting that consultations with indigenous peoples in Colombia were carried out according to “national norms”. As far as he knew, no consultations had been held.

He then pointed out that Colombia had ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169 [relating to the rights of indigenous peoples]. What did that imply about Colombia’s commitment to Convention 169, in light of its provision on free prior informed consent?

CHARLIE THACH, Khmer Kampuchea Krom Federation, said that unlike many indigenous communities in North and South America, those in Asia had not been recognized by their Governments at all. It was feared that any future work on indigenous issues at the international level would not be relevant to Asia’s indigenous peoples. Taking advantage of the recent adoption of the Declaration, she sought help from the Forum and Governments to set up a deadline for countries that had not signed the Declaration to do so. She requested the Forum to help set up an open dialogue between the Khmer Kampuchea Krom community with the Government of Viet Nam, with the aim of securing proper recognition of their indigenous status and to ensure they were included in decision-making processes. She requested the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to create vocational programmes in areas where indigenous peoples lived, since there was a concern that the Millennium Development Goals of indigenous peoples would not be met.

ENRIQUE OCHOA MARTINEZ (Mexico) noted that indigenous communities depended on forestry, fishing and agriculture. They lived in a fragile ecosystem, making it essential to promote their participation in negotiations relating to climate change. The international community must study ways to bring about their effective participation in the design and development of mitigation and adaptation activities. It must study the relationship between climate change, indigenous peoples and gender equality, and how to include indigenous viewpoints when preparing national policies.

He said Mexico's national commission on the development of indigenous peoples was the main body through which indigenous peoples' issues were addressed. The law establishing that commission required the Government to consult indigenous peoples on any policies and projects that might affect them. A means for consulting indigenous peoples would be implemented in 2008. In the meantime, a study was being conducted on the effects of climate change on the environment of indigenous peoples. Information was being collected on the machinery used by indigenous peoples to mitigate the effects of climate change on their land.

MARY SIMAT, IPACC, said her group was a non-governmental organization composed of individuals from 20 countries and their aim was to promote sustainable practices, increasingly through information technologies. They worked with bodies such as the World Bank to spread information about their rights among the indigenous peoples, particularly the principle of free and prior consent. The implementation of information technologies helped disseminate the information. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) needed to work more closely with groups such as hers and there was a need to establish national working groups for advising peoples of their rights and helping them to attain them.

Implementation of Previous Recommendations

VERNON MUNOZ, the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on the right to education, introduced the theme of implementing recommendations. He said goals on education were lagging in many countries. Poverty was a key contributor to the situation, since many children needed to work six or more hours a day. Furthermore, the right to be educated in a mother tongue was a basic one that helped preserve the richness and diversity of cultures. More effort needed to be expended to overcome disdain for local languages and to curtail the hostilities that arose between indigenous groups as a result of the marginalization and discrimination by the population at large.

He said social homogeneity was impossible. The concept of a delineated and autonomous state was incompatible with the indigenous peoples' concept of "belonging". The knowledge of the indigenous peoples must be recognized as a valid and cooperative way of life whose only border was the limit of knowledge.

KATHERINE STEWART, Director-General, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Health Canada, said the Government recognized the distinctive health needs of the First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples of Canada. An Inuit-led Health Summit was held in January 2008 to help focus attention on the unique issues and needs facing that community. The Government had invested funds for health projects designed to help the Inuit, including a pilot project on mental wellness and on collecting data on Inuit health. In 2008, Health Canada established an Office of Inuit Health.

She said that in 2008-2009, Health Canada would spend over \$2 billion to promote better health outcomes for all aboriginal peoples. Meanwhile, \$147 million in federal funding was being allocated to benefit First Nations and the Inuit in the next two years. Those programmes would focus on health issues such as maternal-child health and diabetes, collecting data and information and tackling tuberculosis. Another \$330 million would be used to improve First Nations' access to safe drinking water over the next two years.

BRIGITTE FEIRING, Chief Technical Adviser, Programme to promote ILO Convention 169, International Labour Organization, turned to the Forum's recommendations in 2006 -- directed at the World Bank, IMF, United Nations organizations and other members of the international community -- to explore mechanisms to include indigenous peoples in poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) and to report back on progress made. In 2007, the ILO initiated a one-year process to do just that in Cambodia, Cameroon and Nepal, with support from Denmark. The ILO worked with Governments,

donors, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations to influence PRSP processes, particularly their implementation.

She said the ILO had published a practice guide on the inclusion of indigenous peoples in policymaking process. It was not meant as a blueprint for such activities. Rather, it addressed the importance of contextualizing approaches to country-specific situations in applying international standards to national processes. It speaks of the difficulties in achieving the commitment of donors and financial institutions in making development more inclusive. She expressed surprise that there had been no attempt to include indigenous viewpoints in the international financial aid architecture, such as the Paris and Rome Declarations and in the PRSPs themselves. Indigenous points of view tended to be incorporated in specific projects with limited impact, and not in broader national policies and programmes. That could only be rectified through sustained dialogue and practical collaboration at the country level. The ILO would continue to raise awareness of the issue within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), for example.

CARLOS SUÁREZ (Colombia) said his country had abstained from voting on the Declaration, but national legislation was consistent with the Declaration's principles. There were, however, some elements in the Declaration that conflicted with national law, including those relating to resources in the subsoil. Also, the principle of prior consent did not harmonize with the Constitution, which called for prior consultations, not prior consent. Further, his country was party to the ILO Convention, which also covered the indigenous peoples' rights on standards, such as multiculturalism. New requirements to be met through legislation were always arising and Colombia's law evolved to meet them. The legislative branch had its own way of meeting the needs of its people, including through dialogue and debate. Colombia, like every State, had developed its Constitution to protect its people.

MICHAEL DODSON, Forum member from Australia, introduced a paper in progress on indigenous land rights and land tenure and requested an extension of his mandate as a special rapporteur on the matter, so as to continue the work on free and prior consent as a central principle of both the Declaration and the ILO Convention on indigenous peoples.

MARCOS ESPINAL, Executive Secretary, Global Stop Tuberculosis Partnership, World Health Organization, noted that 9 million people suffered from the disease worldwide, and 2 million had died. One third of the global population, or 2 billion people, was currently infected by the bacteria causing tuberculosis. That disease was one of the three major killers of the adult population -- which was a complete disgrace, because it could be cured with a \$20 treatment. Rates of infection among indigenous peoples were 20 to 30 times higher than among non-indigenous peoples. The Forum's commitment to combating the disease was crucial and, working jointly with the World Health Organization and 700 of its partners worldwide, it could help wipe out tuberculosis among indigenous peoples.

QIN XIAOMEI, a Permanent Forum member from China, highlighted the importance of education to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Education was a basic human right and a sine qua non for achieving other human rights. Through education, societies could better promote the realization of economic and social development of indigenous peoples, thereby ensuring the collective rights of peoples, not just individual rights.

She urged international organizations and civil society to play their part in promoting education. Governments and indigenous peoples should work together do the same, on the basis of mutual trust. Also, indigenous peoples risked losing their languages because of globalization. Various countries should make use of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to increase the use of those languages.

EGBERTO TABO CHIPUNAVI, speaking on behalf of the Amazon Basin, said his group represented 1.5 million people from 400 communities in a large area of the Amazon Basin. He called for the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in the Climate Change Convention processes and matters relating to the Convention on Biodiversity. The United Nations should establish a group of indigenous experts that would coordinate with specialized United Nations agencies

responsible for implementation of indigenous issues. The world must ensure full respect for the right of indigenous peoples to free prior informed consent.

He went on to call for more access to technology transfer discussions, and that support be given to indigenous strategies to mitigate the effects of climate change. Further, industrialized countries must make reparations for any damages they were responsible for causing.

LILIANE MUZANGI MBELA, Forum member from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, recommended that copies of the WHO report be made available.

CHAITANYA SUBBA, Member of the National Planning Commission of Nepal, said his country was on track for achieving goals on poverty and hunger, but there were disparities in the circumstances of the large numbers of ethnic groups in Nepal. About 44 per cent of indigenous peoples lived below the poverty line, as compared to the national average of 31 per cent. Malnutrition was acute in rural areas inhabited largely by the disadvantaged indigenous. Nepal was also off track on education and making slow but steady progress in gender-related areas. In those, and all areas, Nepal depended on foreign aid as a crucial element in its development programme.

He said his country was in the process of a big political transformation, now that a successful Constituent Assembly had been held on 10 April. That, along with a three-year plan already in place for poverty reduction and elimination of disparities, was allowing Nepal to enter a new era of inclusive democracy in which the indigenous peoples and other excluded groups participated. The impact of climate change, however, was having a catastrophic effect on the environment and people, particularly the indigenous living in remote areas. The Government was seeking international cooperation to implement adaptation and mitigation measures.

HASSAN ID BALKASSM, Forum member from Morocco, asked whether the Russian Government had a strategy for incorporating the rights of indigenous peoples into its constitution. And what had Mexico done upon adoption of the Declaration? Were measures being taken to safeguard the natural resources and languages of its indigenous peoples?

A representative of Bolivia said that the Government was facing challenges in making the Declaration operational, despite having turned it into law. Tackling current land-holding patterns was proving difficult, given that even foreigners were engaged in land-grabbing in Bolivia. Some people were still being treated as slaves -- for example, the Guarani. He called on the Forum to help support the indigenous Government of Bolivia in removing the impediments to implementation of the country's very own laws. He asked that committees be formed to record what was happening in Bolivia and to help address the issues he had just talked about.

LOURDES TIBAN, Minister, Ministry of Indigenous Issues, Ecuador, echoed the sentiments expressed by Forum member Bartolomé Clavero, and suggested that the Forum take note of who was and was not supporting the Declaration. For its part, Ecuador was earnestly implementing its provisions, including article 23, which called for the active participation of indigenous peoples in elaborating and determining economic and social programmes, and to deliver those programmes through their own institutions. In Ecuador, the body in charge of doing so was the Council for Development of Indigenous Peoples. It was about to implement projects to combat poverty and create employment; ensure access to services; ensure diversity and the participation of indigenous peoples in society; engage in the sustainable use of natural resources; and strengthen Government in indigenous territories.

She noted that international efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals had not been encouraging, and expressed the view that they could not be achieved by 2015. The pledge by developed nations to raise official development assistance to 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product had not been met. The imbalance among States was growing, as was the gap between poor and rich within nations. There seemed to be a lack of political will on the part of many States to complete the World Trade Organization's Doha development round.

LUZ ANGELA MELO, Human Rights Adviser for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) said an intercultural approach to economic, social and cultural rights was essential for ensuring access to quality basic services for indigenous peoples all over the world. The United Nations Development Group had elaborated comprehensive guidelines for the use of Country Teams to make sure the needs and rights of indigenous peoples were taken into account in the design of development programmes. While not binding, the guidelines were very useful in encouraging the relevant parts of the United Nations system and Governments to systematically include indigenous issues and poverty reduction strategies in their development frameworks.

She said her organization had carried out a regional initiative to eradicate maternal mortality among indigenous women by promoting public policies and pilot experiences with intercultural strategies. Five countries in Latin America had begun implementing the programme. The direction for future work with indigenous peoples was to bring together and integrate three key approaches, namely human rights, gender equality and the intercultural approach.

LAURA SYLVIA CALMWIND spoke for the Native Women's Association of Canada, Indigenous Network on Economics and Trade, Mohawk of Kanawake and BC First Nation Leadership. She said Canada had abstained on the Declaration because it did not want to give its indigenous peoples their rights. On the contrary, it used all methods of aggression against them and put all its efforts into depriving them of their rights and their power. The international community and members of the Forum must put out an urgent appeal for Canada to put a stop to violations of the human rights of the indigenous peoples. The Forum must also call for an independent monitor of the situation and for a special session on the effect of climate change on indigenous peoples. Pressure should also be brought to bear on the Government of Canada to free the indigenous leaders it had imprisoned.

Mr. MUNOZ, Special Rapporteur, said that gaining indigenous peoples' access to schools was not enough. He pointed out that never before had so many educated people killed so many others. Schools needed to improve the content and quality of educational material, so that what they taught was relevant and culturally sensitive. He appealed to Governments to work with members of civil society to ensure that the right to good quality education was being respected.

BERNIE YATES, Deputy Secretary, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Australia, responded to issues directed at Australia so far. First, he welcomed the positive comments made on the apology in relation to the Stolen Generation, and welcomed the remarks of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, on the Australian Government's statement of intent to close the gap in indigenous health. The Commissioner had been instrumental in developing a partnership with the Government based on shared ambitions and goals.

Regarding concerns of child abuse in the Northern Territory, he said massive Government resources had been expended to address those problems. The result was more police presence and night patrols. School nutrition programmes were providing children with lunch in schools. Food security was being upgraded on a region-by-region basis, through community stores licensing arrangements. Jobs occupied by aboriginal people had been recognized as Government service delivery jobs, and workers given the appropriate entitlements.

On the employment programme in the Northern Territory, he said the new Government had announced a moratorium on the previous Government's plans to phase out the community job schemes. Some 300 indigenous ranger jobs were being created around the country as part of the "Working on Country" programme. An expert review of the country's emergency response in the Northern Territory would take place independent of the Government and in consultation with indigenous communities.

On aboriginal land rights, he said the Aboriginal Land Rights Act of 1976 continued to provide indigenous people the power to negotiate and control mining on their land and to receive returns. The Government was also undertaking consultations with stakeholders on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Ms. ESTRADA (Mexico) said she would make a fuller statement later, but efforts to implement the Declaration centred on disseminating information about the Declaration to the relevant indigenous groups. Hardcopies were being distributed and radio messages broadcast, both in Spanish and indigenous languages. The Declaration was also being distributed to Government departments. A council had been set up composed of locally elected indigenous representatives and other governmental actors. The secretariat in the department of natural resources was in charge of sustainable development measures.

Panellists

The Forum then took up a half-day discussion on indigenous languages, hearing from four panellists: Lars Anders Baer, member of the Permanent Forum from Sweden; Lourdes Tiban, Secretaria Ejecutiva Nacional (Executive Secretary), Consejo de Desarrollo de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos del Ecuador; Rochelle Roca-Hachem, Programme Specialist for Culture, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); Anna Lucia D'emilio, Senior Adviser, Education and Excluded Population, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office; and Richard Grounds, Director, Euchee Language Project.

Mr. BAER said Governments tended to be highly unaware of the effects had by the loss of language -- indigenous languages were a vessel of traditional knowledge on biological diversity, for example. Many did little to reverse the trend. He noted that 2008 was the International Year of Languages, and that the Permanent Forum had recommended that the Economic and Social Council convene an expert meeting on indigenous languages in preparation for it. That meeting took place from 21 April to 2 May 2007. On 10 January, it adopted conclusions and recommendations (document E/C.19/2008/3), in which it suggested that language rights be implemented as a collective and individual right, since they were integral to self-determination.

He said that the implementation of language rights must be viewed from a holistic perspective, since it could not be enjoyed in the absence of other human rights -- such as the right to dissent, and self-determination. Some States were indeed promoting the use of indigenous languages, but many programmes were under-funded.

He said the experts also recommended that the international community draft a convention to protect indigenous language, identities and cultural rights. There was a need to create instruments to collect information regarding the use of indigenous languages, and to create an authoritative body on language rights. There should be a special rapporteur on language rights and a commissioner on "language discrimination".

He said the international community should begin to view the violation of language rights as a crime against humanity. Many indigenous children were not getting access to education. Most State education policies forced indigenous children to learn in the dominant State language, causing a "language shift". It encouraged a change in attitude towards indigenous languages, in that those languages were thought to be less "worthy" than dominant language. Losing their language meant children became socially dislocated, ultimately leading to economic and social marginalization. Indigenous children tended to have the lowest level of educational attainment. They also suffered high rates of depression and teen suicide. Violation of language rights was a form of cultural genocide, or "ethnocide", and amounted to a crime against humanity. The Forum was encouraged to consider appropriate action.

Ms. TIBAN said measures were being taken in her country to ensure that education in indigenous languages was made available. Many criticized the dual language system, but language accounted for the richness of culture. The right to use one's indigenous language had been incorporated into the 1994 Constitution of Ecuador, yet very few had exercised their right to avail themselves of the resources to do so. There were few indigenously speaking attorneys capable of representing indigenous peoples as a result. The thinking about indigenous practices, lifestyles and language needed to change. For example, Quechua was considered a backward language, but in actuality it took a very intelligent person to speak it.

Ms. ROCA-HACHEM said she was pleased that the discussion on language was taking place during the 2008 Year of Languages, because languages had been gaining in importance throughout the world in the past few years and concern for linguistic diversity and multilingualism was growing. “Languages are a vehicle of knowledge, a tool for communication and inclusion, and an expression of identity and diversity”, she said. Important statements and standard-setting instruments had testified to a growing awareness of the importance of language at the international level.

Under the pressure of accelerating globalization, languages and their complex implications were of strategic importance in terms of identity and social integration at both the global and local levels, she said. But, globalization was also causing languages to disappear and create an immeasurable loss for both linguistic and cultural diversity. The Declaration had acknowledged the significance of indigenous cultures in the world’s cultural landscape. It had gone beyond considering “language as cultural heritage” and had called for indigenous peoples to control their educational institutions in their own languages.

In a position paper on education in a multilingual world, she said UNESCO had called for support of three principles: instruction in the mother tongue, bilingual or multilingual education, and intercultural education. In UNESCO’s 2008-2009 biennium, the indigenous issues priority of the midterm strategy had been translated into a rich interdisciplinary programme. Guidelines for inclusive education had been developed. The platform on languages had identified indigenous languages as one key area of focus, since they represented vehicles for indigenous knowledge and practices. The platform on dialogue among civilizations and cultures included dialogue with indigenous peoples.

In short, she said UNESCO created standard-setting tools and it needed synergy with operational projects in the field. All stakeholders who were interested in preserving the richness of human culture should join resources in joint ventures for a shared strategy on preserving indigenous languages as an important component of a bigger issue -- which was to ensure that the world’s underserved populations were respected and given their due.

Mr. GROUNDS took the floor to deliver a greeting in the Euchee language, which he later translated to mean “Languages were gifts from the Creator. The Euchee would exist so long as the language was alive”. He then explained that the Euchee language was now only spoken by five people in the world, as was the case with many other Native American languages. *The New York Times* and *US News and World Report* showed that Oklahoma, where the Euchee people lived, was one of the places on the planet where languages were disappearing at a fast rate.

He said he valued his language as a way to pass down Native American ceremonies to young people, noting that the boarding school system that was forced upon Native Americans had caused a kind of physical and cultural “genocide”. It had the effect of breaking the line of tradition, by, for example, making it difficult to pass down traditional songs that had existed since time immemorial. Of the 6,600 languages spoken in the world, more than half were spoken by a mere 0.2 per cent of the world’s population -- 5 out of 6 languages were indigenous. The challenge lay in empowering those indigenous communities to pass their languages and traditional knowledge to future generations.

He said the boarding school systems of the United States, Canada and Australia were the result of millions of dollars of investment, and had been applied systematically for generations to eradicate indigenous languages. Indigenous communities needed a great deal of help to bring back those languages. Universities were doing a little bit to preserve those languages, by recording a few words and phrases. But, that was not enough. The larger goal should be to keep those languages alive, so that entire communities could retain the memory of their history and traditions, as well as relationships to other communities outside their own nation. Some of those traditions contained very specialized knowledge on how to live in specific environments. He challenged specialized agencies such as UNESCO to make a special effort to preserve the smallest languages especially.

Ms. D’EMILIO noted that, before ILO Convention 169 and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples came into being, there existed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which had been ratified by almost all countries. That Convention contained a provision saying that no indigenous child could be denied the right to his or her language and culture. By that provision, no one could prevent the right of children to use English in the United States, say, or Italian in Italy. However,

from UNICEF's standpoint, the exercise of that right could not be conditioned by the number of speakers of a given language. Therefore, it was working with small communities whose language was in danger of becoming extinct.

She said UNICEF was working with both States and indigenous peoples to increase the use of indigenous languages, within the framework of indigenous peoples' rights. Those who opposed what she termed "bilingual cultural education" habitually said that it was expensive, complex and politically sensitive. Yet, several assessments had demonstrated that bilingual education brought immense psychological and emotional benefits -- for example, children were more expressive when compared to those not in culturally bilingual schools. But, application of bilingual education remained limited and, to date, no country had universalized intercultural bilingual education.

She said bilingual cultural education was implemented with the help of international funds and some funding from governments, but that funding was in decline. UNICEF was currently promoting the cause in 20 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Using indigenous languages in the education system could not change the low esteem in which those languages were held. They also needed to be used in courts and by the media, while the speakers themselves bore a responsibility to promote their languages. For its part, UNICEF was disseminating the Declaration in 15 indigenous languages and was currently creating an "ethno-linguistic atlas". It had been discovered that strategies with the best results were those that involved indigenous peoples themselves. The use of indigenous languages was important in empowering those communities, and helped reduce educational gaps between girls and boys.

PATRICIA NERI, Director General, Aboriginal Affairs Branch, Heritage Canada, said her country's indigenous peoples spoke 50 different languages, each of which was a reflection of the country's great diversity in culture and identity. There were 11 families of indigenous languages and 10 of first family languages, including that of the Métis and Inuit. The rich diversity was in peril, however. In 2006, only one person in five spoke an indigenous mother tongue. Many of the aboriginal languages were experiencing long-term declines in intergeneration transmission. A concerted effort on the part of the Government had begun to reverse that trend.

She said the Aboriginal Language Initiative supported over 200 community-based language projects. Initiatives included the recording of interviews with elders and the digitization of language materials. Support had been given to the development of dictionaries for more than 25 endangered aboriginal languages. Support for a programme that promoted the use of Michif had preserved that endangered language for 21 Métis communities. The Government was committed to collecting and analysing data on aboriginal languages, to developing indicators and to making sustainable investments in community-based language initiatives. Given the importance of cross-cultural communication, it was critical for communities to take the lead in identifying priorities, developing plans and undertaking preservation activities. Also, to share best practices, knowledge and expertise.

NAULLAG ARNAGUG, Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth, the Government of Nunavut, said her government had come into effect on 1 April 1999 as the newest Canadian territory. The first job of the government had been to elaborate a constitution. When that went into effect, Inuit would become an official language of Canada along with French and English. In that way, the Government of Nunavut had achieved a unique foothold in the area of indigenous language protection.

EDWARD JOHN, Grand Chief, North American Regional Caucus, speaking on behalf of all indigenous regional caucuses, then delivered a joint statement on tuberculosis. He noted that, of the millions suffering and dying from tuberculosis, many were indigenous peoples. Yet, no data was being collected on indigenous communities. He recommended that the Forum consider the tuberculosis pandemic as urgent. Its members were urged to support empowerment programmes targeted towards the eradication of tuberculosis. It should support the development and implementation of the Global Stop TB initiative by providing political encouragement to that initiative and to demand the resources needed for the cause. The Forum should assist in the implementation of article 24 on the rights of indigenous peoples to the right to physical and mental health. He recommended that the Global Stop TB partnership be asked to report annually to the Forum.

Mr. CLAVERO, member of the Permanent Forum from Spain, said the statements heard so far ranged from the very optimistic, given by one international organization, to the very pessimistic, given by an indigenous speaker. The fact that the indigenous peoples were not as optimistic as the international organizations was indicative of a problem.

He recalled that panellist Lars Anders Baer had used the term “genocide” to describe the outcome of certain language policies. Indeed, the Convention on Genocide, itself, said that the term “genocide” also applied to methods used to make groups disappear without there necessarily being any death. Policies that impaired the retention of indigenous languages could, therefore, be described as tools of genocide, and it would seem that defects in the linguistic policies of some countries was indeed resulting in genocide. For instance, the forced transfer of children from one community to another had robbed entire generations of their culture. It would be a good idea to emphasize the genocidal tendencies of such policies, and compensation should be made to victims of those policies. Bilingual education might be “genocidal”, too, if taken from the standpoint of the Convention on Genocide.

LUCY TE MOANA, Te Puni Kokiri, Ministry of Māori Development, New Zealand, said a programme established in 1999 to revitalize the Maori language had led to the establishment of a Maori Language Strategy. Among the initiatives was the establishment of a community based programme that supported and funded tribal language plans. A Maori television service had been established and support for radio had been increased. A language line service provided translation on demand to government agencies. The Strategy would be reviewed in 2008 after five years of implementation.

MARIA SUMIRE, Parliamentarian of the Parlamento Indigena de America, said she represented the Quechua of Peru and that preserving language was an integral part of preserving the culture itself. At present, however, there was a tendency in national populations at large to hold in disdain those who spoke their individual languages. Linguistic rights must be recognized as part of basic human rights and speakers of indigenous languages must be returned to the positions of respect they deserved. States must have indigenous language participation in their Governments and they must provide the funds for interpretation and related services.

KLEMETTI NÄKKÄLÄJÄRVI, President, Saami Parliament of Finland, said languages were not only a means of communication, but an important part of culture. Indigenous languages were a specialized part of culture and windows to the people’s relationship with nature. Death of a language meant unique knowledge stored in that language disappeared, along with the capacity to function and adapt to global, social and environmental changes. It was, therefore, critical to preserve indigenous languages and was the best way to ensure the future of indigenous culture. Researchers said language influenced the way people thought and was a tool for thinking. Consequently, when considering cultures, it was important to bear in mind how important language was to the preservation of cultures.

He said he was a member of the Saami reindeer herding family. Saamis were experts in reading nature and had very special and distinct terminology for environmental conditions and phenomena. The Saami language had a vast storage of terminology and appellatives for snow, which created certainty when navigating and moving in the landscape. There were nine Saami languages left, all endangered. There were good laws in Finland in support of the indigenous communities, but implementation was hampered by a lack of resources. However, there are good examples of the revitalization of some languages, notably the Anarsami language. The availability of official documents and other material provided for the general public was good. The international community must do what it could to help developing nations preserve their indigenous languages.

JULIAN HENNINGSSEN, Member of the Danish Parliament, said the Greenland Home Rule Government was responsible for language development and preservation in Greenland, and she was speaking on behalf of Greenland as a member of the Danish Parliament. She said she shared the concern of the expert group regarding the lack of urgency for policy measures to reverse the threat for extinction of some indigenous languages. Language rights were a human right, which were connected to the right to self-determination. Greenland had developed a tradition of literacy in the past 150 years, transferring tales and traditions into writing. Greenland had also developed a tradition of translating world literature into Greenlandic, the latest being the Harry Potter books.

She said the Greenland Home Rule Government appointed language committees tasked with developing standardized use of language in writing. The language committees had working relationships with Inuit bodies dealing with the Inuit language in Canada, Alaska and Chukotka. The Greenland Parliament was in the process of preparing legislation on language integration, where the Greenlandic Inuit language would become the main language, while Danish would be taught in school and used in public affairs.

WALTER REYEZ XITUMUL, of the Ministry of Culture and Sport of Guatemala, said that a law of languages promoted the use of 22 Mayan languages in Guatemala. Prejudice was an obstacle to implementing measures to keep alive some of the endangered languages, one of the major vehicles for handing down the cultural worldview from one generation to the next. UNESCO and other relevant actors should develop strategies for how to preserve languages and keep alive multiculturalism. All must stand together in interacting and in equality of respect.

ELISA CANQUI MOLLO, Forum member from Bolivia, made note of the importance of UNESCO's work.

GABRIELA GARDUZO ESTRADA, of the National Commission on Indigenous People of Mexico, said her country had reformed its legislation to strengthen the legal basis for the linguistic rights of its indigenous peoples. Bilingual speakers were needed to provide services to people. A catalogue of the official indigenous languages had been published and an advisory council had been established to facilitate the introduction of indigenous languages into official processes. Work was also proceeding on revamping the educational machinery to develop the best models for how to teach indigenous languages. There should be a world conference on linguistic diversity.

A representative of the Russian Federation took the floor in response to a question from a member of the Permanent Forum. He said his country had been implementing the provisions of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples long before that document was formally adopted by the General Assembly. In addition, Russia's new Constitution had begun using the term "indigenous peoples" as an official term for vulnerable ethnic groups, and guaranteed the rights of those people to land and other resources. Numerous legal documents of all sorts also guaranteed their rights. Federal law guaranteed their right to language, traditions and culture, as enshrined in laws relating to their cultural autonomy, thus providing the maximum conditions for their socio-economic development.

BEVERLY JACOBS, Global Indigenous Women's Caucus, said language revitalization frameworks such as master-apprentice programmes had been successful even where only six fluent speakers of the particular language were living. Inexpensive technologies were easily available for recording, transmitting and translating of languages. Those should be made widely available. She called on States to immediately support indigenous peoples' language revitalization efforts. In addition to support of master-apprentice programmes, it entailed the creation of more links between formal schools and families.

She also recommended that UNESCO, WIPO and UNICEF make available the means to access technologies that would enable them to recover and preserve languages. All forms of policy provision, legal recognition, and integration of languages into education programmes should be given all necessary support. The Forum should recognize the central role of mothers and elders in language recovery. Also, there should be proper linguistic mapping of indigenous languages.

ANJALI DAIMARI, the Asia Indigenous Caucus, said it was regrettable that indigenous languages were not given more recognition by the population at large of certain countries. In 1974, a group of 15 indigenous peoples were killed as they participated in a protest over their rights to use the Roman alphabet for writing down their own language. A group of international experts should be convened on indigenous languages as called for in ILO Convention 169 on indigenous and tribal peoples. UNESCO should also develop a programme to revitalize endangered indigenous languages.

OLAV MATTIS EIRA, Arctic Caucus, welcomed the Forum's initiative to discuss language rights, and welcomed the report of the experts' group meeting on the subject. There was a need for concrete public policies to protect such languages. He expressed concern over the lack of awareness among Governments and intergovernmental bodies about policy measures to reverse that trend.

National policies tended to neglect the preservation of languages in their programmes to uphold cultural rights. In sorting out ways to craft language rights, policy makers should keep in mind the universal and interdependent nature of all human rights. Language rights must be implemented as a collective and individual right. Nordic authorities had accommodated the rights of the Saami in their legislative frameworks, making them less oppressed than most indigenous groups. But, he noted that even that group faced challenges related to language rights.

LEGBORSI SARO PYAGBARA, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, expressed concern about the actions of the Nigerian Government to decimate the languages of indigenous communities in the country, while at the same time providing State support for the development of three majority languages of the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa. Those languages had been made part of the national education curriculum, which could not be said of the Ogoni language. For the Ogoni, it was like a passport to extinction. The policy amounted to cultural genocide.

He recommended that the Nigerian Government set up a comprehensive language revival programme and that constitutional reviews be held to deal with that anomaly. He called on the Nigerian Government to respect its international obligations by implementing the international conventions and agreements which it had entered into. He called on the Forum to develop indicators for monitoring language development and survival.

MARCOS BIG CLOUDS, the Youth Caucus, said the ongoing oppression and suppression of languages must be stopped. There were indigenous peoples in Libya who were not allowed to exercise their linguistic rights and in the United States, people were forced to speak only English. The importance of traditional knowledge was dismissed if the erosion of languages was allowed. “We youth are not the leaders of tomorrow but the leaders of today,” he said, and called for elders to work with youth on programmes to keep languages alive and revitalize multilingualism. States should affirm the validity of multi-languages among their people and they should implement measures to promote the use of multiple languages in their societies. The Forum should lead the global language revitalization effort.

LINO VILLCA DELGADO, the Indigenous Parliament of Bolivia, said there were 37 indigenous languages in his country and it was part of the educational approach that they be taught and used alongside Spanish. Prohibitions against coca were just as discriminatory against indigenous cultures as prohibitions against the use of indigenous languages. Both were part of traditional culture. There were no grounds on which to ban coca tea, for example. Coca was not cocaine. It was a friendly plant, just like any other plant. The Forum should call for the extradition of former President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozado, who was responsible for brutal killings in October 2003. Both the Aimara and the Quechua had suffered in Bolivia.

ME ARMAND McKENZIE, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, Innu Nation, Institut Culturel Educatif Montagnais, said that when the Permanent Forum’s terms of reference was being drafted, indigenous leaders had worked with representatives of States as equal partners. Yet, the time allotted to indigenous people at the present meeting was not equal to the time given to the nine Government representatives who took the floor. They should be given equal time, especially in light of the fact that the indigenous peoples’ representatives held high posts within their respective communities.

He then directed a question to the representative of Canada, saying that if it was true that millions of dollars were being spent on the development and protection of indigenous peoples, why was the Government so afraid to adopt the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples?

* * * * *

For information media • not an official record