

March 27, 2008

DPI/NGO BRIEFING ON

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACT ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Thursday, March 20, 2008, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

1. Background Information:

Climate change is changing the way human beings coexist with their surrounding environment. This applies especially to indigenous peoples who maintain a close relationship with the land. Today's briefing looked at how climate change affects the lives of indigenous people around the world.

2. Before the briefing started two United Nations TV produced films were shown.

2.1 The first film covered indigenous people in Brazil, Venezuela and Australia. The problems of indigenous people in Canada and in the Dakotas in the United States had similar problems. The governments are damaging their communities because their land are being used as toxic dump sites.

Indigenous people throughout the world have to live in abject poverty, are discriminated against and have no access to anyone that can help them. There are some 370 million indigenous people living in some 70 countries. For them it has been a negative effect living in an economic world.

There are some 6000 languages in the world with 4000 languages spoken by indigenous people. The film stated that we must find a way to bring society and indigenous people together.

Past Secretary-General Kofi-Annan participated throughout the film indicating what the United Nations has tried to do during sessions at the United Nations. In the film he indicated that the Permanent Forum of the United Nations has to advise UNOSG on these problems. International labor organizations are participating.

He stated that it was important that funds be made available to indigenous people and all governments and people must participate. Representatives attending the conference spoke of their problems and the lack of funds.

2.2 The second film, "The Impact of Climate Change on Indigenous People" was shown. It covered Lake Chad in Africa. Because of climate changes, the water in Lake Chad lowered drastically. This has made it difficult to fish there. The lake is now one fifth of its former size.

The problems in the South of Africa has effected some 20 million people there. They do not have enough water to feed Lake Chad. This has effected both fisherman, farmers and animals that used to feed water from Lake Chad. The drastic reduction of water has resulted in deserts being formed similar to North Africa.

Plans underway to start a project to feed water to Lake Chad to make up for the loss. They need funding for this. Thirty-five million people depend on Lake Chad for their survival. A minimum of 6 million dollars is needed to build a channel to Lake Chad.

3. Moderator:

Juan Carlos Brandt, Chief, DPI/NGO

Speakers:

H.E. Mr. Collin D. Beck, Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of the Solomon Islands to the United Nations

Ms. Elsa Stamatopoulou, Chief, Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Mr. Roberto Borrero, Chairperson, NGO Committee on the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples

Mr. Brandt, the moderator, welcomed everyone and introduced each of the speakers with their backgrounds.

4. The first speaker, H.E. Mr. Collin D. Beck, spoke about the effect climate change had on small island states and the challenges that it created for indigenous peoples of the Solomon Islands. He noted the great diversity among the half a million people living in his country the Solomon Islands. Ninety percent of them belong to indigenous groups who speak 80 different languages. Ambassador Beck stressed that all of the basic needs of the indigenous people came from natural resources. This has been greatly influenced by the changes in the environment.

He stated that climate change issues varied within each indigenous community and were directly related to their specific geographical region. The frequent occurrence of natural disasters such as high tides, tsunami and cyclones in disaster prone areas caused the progress made in certain locations to regress.

Ambassador Beck also mentioned the subject of indigenous people migrating to bigger islands because of these climate changes. However with migration came the threat of conflict between different ethnic groups and the loss of traditional culture. Furthermore he stated that urbanization contributed to increased poverty. Ambassador Beck ended by calling for the need to move away from policy making into taking action on the ground.

5. The second speaker, Ms. Elsa Stamatopoulou, discussed the importance of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to try to solve this crises. The Forum will be focusing on climatic change and indigenous people during this year' session. Specifically, they will be addressing the issues of the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Islands.

Ms. Stamatopoulou stressed the importance of raising the awareness of the issues faced by indigenous peoples. She stated that the effect of climate change on indigenous people was a matter of their survival. She stated that indigenous people were not contributors to climate change, but suffered the gravest consequences from it. Yet the voices of indigenous peoples have not entered the mainstream of the climate change debate.

She also mentioned a study of biofuel development and its impact it has had on the territories and on the livelihoods of indigenous populations. For example, corn used to fill up one SUV tank with ethanol would feed one person for one year. Ms. Stamatopoulou cited the right to food and blamed the development of biofuels for the 40 percent increase in food costs worldwide. She concluded by stating that solidarity was in important factor in addressing the indigenous issues.

6. The last speaker, Mr. Robert Borrero, stated that climate change was about the kind of world we are going to leave for our children and their children. He called for long-term rather than short-term solutions. Mr. Borrero examined the importance of indigenous people being able to be actively involved in preserving their culture and land.

He defended the right of indigenous people to ownership and discussed the difficulties they are encountering when trying to protect or preserve the land they do not own.

Mr. Borrero also mentioned the difficulties indigenous peoples accessing mainstream healthcare that they do not have. He concluded by saying that for many years people have seen ice melting around the world, now is the time to melt the ice in the hearts of men.

7. Questions/Answers:

7.1 H.E. Mr. Collin Beck; Victims of nuclear testing exist in the Pacific islands of the Solomon and surrounding area. Treaties now preserve this area and prevent any more testing there. The challenges of urbanization of indigenous people require more partners to invest in the islands. This would result in indigenous people not having to travel to urban areas for school or work. Gender and climate change is everything.

7.2 Mr. Robert Borrero; Indigenous people are looking for a seat at the table. NGOs can provide for a place for them to stay when they come to the United Nations to present their case. He stated that NGOs must disseminate this information on indigenous people. The media is not covering this area.

7.3 Ms. Elsa Stamatopoulou; The World Bank must revise their policy concerning indigenous people. Indigenous people are now part of the Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration of Human Rights now address the problems of human rights and indigenous people.

8. Note: The archived webcast of this event is available at www.un.org/webcast.

PDC George Weinstein
National UN Chairman