

April 23, 2007

DPI/NGO BRIEFING ON
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' LANDS, TERRITORIES,
NATURAL RESOURCES: LIVELIHOODS AND
EMERGING ISSUES

Thursday, April 19, 2007, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Background Information:

1. This briefing looked at the traditional lifestyles, practices and struggles of indigenous peoples around the globe. There are over 300 million indigenous peoples living in nearly seventy countries. While they view themselves as caregivers of the land, the needs, rights and challenges of indigenous communities have remained largely neglected by national governments. Among the issues discussed included was the current struggle to maintain their traditional cultures, an environmentally sound relationship with the land and the sustainable use of natural resources.

2. Prior to the start of the conference, a film was shown entitled "Awareness-Raising Film; Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations". This film was done specifically for this forum by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFI). It was prepared by Rebecca Sommer for the Secretariat of United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

The film showed people there and how they live with their animals. The first part of the film showed people in Australia. In the film the people there were dancing in the villages. Other areas shown were in Greenland on the western shore, United States, Canada, Peru, Camaroon, Brazil and Russia.

They presented as past of the film a speech by Secretary-General Kofi-Annan on his trip to Canada on this issue. The Secretary-General's speech was very moving. He indicated that a forum was held at the United Nations to try to solve this problem world wide. The Secretary-General stated that there must be action by member states on this issue. It also showed an Indian chief there who wanted his people to have the right to live in peace but was not allowed to speak.

Indigenous people suffer the world over. Only second-rate rights are given them. These people are victims of human rights. They have no access to lawyers, Human Rights' Groups or governments to seek help. Three hundred to a million people world wide live this way. The film showed them praying for the earth. These people do not want survival but sustainability.

The United Nations Secretary of the UNPFI summarized their needs in the film. He stated that we must protect and help these indigenous people. We must build confidence between indigenous people and society. He stated that they have the right to survive.

He indicated that it is an embarrassment that the United Nations has not included the problems of indigenous people in their agenda. Gender equality is critical. He stated that we have the United Nations, governments and indigenous people working together. The UNPFI must enforce this.

There must be participation by governments and indigenous people in debates. It must also include NGOs and Civil Society. The speaker indicated that governments must now back up their comments at the table with action. Governments must look at this as a special action. There must be more than talk.

This film was an excellent presentation.

DPI/NGO Briefing:

Moderator:

Ms. Robin Della Rocca, DPI/NGO Representative

Speakers:

H.E. Mr. Javier Loayza, Charge D'Affairs, Permanent Mission of Bolivia to the United Nations

Ms. Sonia Smallacombe, Social Affairs Officer, Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

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

The moderator, Ms. Robin Della Rocca, welcomed everyone and introduced each of the speakers with their backgrounds. The room was filled to capacity with many standing.

3. The first speaker was H.E. Mr. Loayza. He stated that we do not own the land. We belong to it. Mr. Loayza stated that we must remember the problems with the Global Crises of Climate Change. Since 1980, the Bolivia government has tried to correct the root causes of land usage.

The most important victory of 1996 was the adoption of the rights of indigenous people in Bolivia. This resulted in the restitution of their land. On the question of land, his governments provides a policy of forty percent employment and help. They also prevent the procurement of those lands by large corporations.

The support of these indigenous people by the allotment of land, their education and help (i.e. water, forests, etc). They also protect these people from any mining activities. The policy of Bolivia is for sustainable development for their indigenous people. His final statement was that we do not own the land we belong to it.

4. The second speaker, Ms. Sonia Smallacombe, spoke on her and her offices' work in the Permanent Forum in the United Nations on the problem of indigenous people. She stated that the linking of poverty and globalization was important. Indigenous people keep knowledge alive. She stated that this important issue is now being discussed at the United Nations.

The heart of the on going discussions at the United Nations is in the protection of the forests, etc. The reduction of Global Warming is very important as is the issue of human rights related to global warming. Global warming is effecting islands where indigenous people live and have to move.

Traditional knowledge is what is in their heads. The young have the opportunity to learn from their elders. Knowledge must be passed on. Indigenous people must keep this knowledge alive.

5. The third and last speaker, Mr. Roberto Mucaro Borrero, indicated that language was important when communicating with each other. We cannot over generalize on indigenous people. Language is different in different communities. We must link the requirements and traditions of each community. There are many linkages

Land and water is life for them. He indicated that they are responding to privatization in Bolivia. He spoke on education in our own homelands. He gave as an example treaties made with native people in the United States.

The critical question he asks are how do we educate governments on the requirements of indigenous people. He asks how many treaties and promises made even in the United States were broken? The rights of indigenous people were stalled by the General Assembly of the United Nations. The dialogues must include indigenous people. Mr. Borrero stated that the United Nations has started this action by including indigenous people in the dialogue.

6. Questions/Answers:

6.1 H.E. Mr. Javier Loayza; He has faith that the resolution on indigenous people will pass in the General Assembly. He stated that NGOs have special action to make this happen.

6.2 Mr. Roberto Mucaro Borrero; He stated that we must first educate ourselves on this issue. Many African states had issues with some parts of the proposed United Nations declaration. Discussions are on-going. Canada, Australia and the United States were against the Declaration. The rights, spelled out in the Declaration, was the result of twenty years of work. He stated that we do not need to re-open the text.

6.3 Ms. Sonia Smallacombe; She recommended that all NGOs should take part in these discussions with their representatives at the United Nations.

6.4 Mr. Roberto Mucaro Borrero; He indicated that we all think about the linkage between global maps and indigenous people. Unfortunately we do not know how many indigenous people there are. Conflicts exist and are linked.

6.5 Ms. Sonia Smallacombe; In regards to access to resources of indigenous lands, corporations want access to resources, benefit sharing, etc. Individual ownership is complex. The individuals have been there for hundreds of years. A lot of countries do not say they have any indigenous people.

6.6 H.E. Mr. Javier Loayza; Bolivia has plans to improve the education both for talking and writing in their languages in their schools including their indigenous people. In Bolivia, indigenous people represent sixty percent of their population.

6.7 H.E. Mr. Javier Loayza; Bolivia needs privatization for investment. They must keep faith and need assistance.

6.8 Ms. Sonia Smallacombe; The Permanent Forum for Indigenous People is the second biggest forum at the United Nations. She again stated that it is important for NGOs to even though it is difficult.

6.9 Mr. Roberto Mucaro Borrero; This Week, April 19, communication on the forum will take place in Minneapolis for grass roots participation to educate people on the issues. He also stated that NGOs must remind governments and United Nations' agencies on the issues.