



22 May 2009

## **INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND UNDP**

### **Ad Melkert, Associate Administrator, UNDP**

Distinguished representatives of indigenous peoples throughout the world,

It is with great honour that I address the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues today.

Since its inaugural Session in 2001, the Permanent Forum has been an indispensable venue for the advancement of justice, peace and dignity for indigenous peoples. The Forum facilitated the historic adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and continues to raise awareness and provide advice to the programmes, funds and agencies of the United Nations.

The Permanent Forum reminds us that the United Nations is much more than just the sum of its Member States. "We the Peoples" is a promise, and that promise extends beyond the nation state. The participation of indigenous peoples in dialogues in and beyond this forum helps the United Nations realize the depth of this promise, and the enrichment that is possible in pursuit of its fulfillment.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is honoured to work in close collaboration with indigenous communities, and its vision of sustainable human development is continually enhanced by our collaborative work. Indeed, commitment to intergenerational equity and environmental balance are common threads that bind UNDP to indigenous peoples across the world.

As the international community mobilizes the collective will to tackle the multiple crises we face in poverty, food, economy, climate change, and conflict – and as we continue work towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – indigenous peoples offer a valued range of perspectives and are uniquely positioned to offer innovative solutions.

I am here today to say that UNDP is committed to listening. Solutions to these crises will not be effectively forged without the full and active participation and input of indigenous communities. With this in mind, I am also here to affirm that UNDP is committed to creating space at the local, regional, national, and international level to ensure that local and indigenous voices are heard, that they inform policy making, and that they are acted upon.

A central area of UNDP work is environment and energy, where indigenous peoples possess key traditional knowledge and expertise. Though hardly recognized, indigenous peoples and local actors are the chief users and guardians of the world's ecosystems, managing or administering at least 22 percent of developing country forests and employing diverse landscape management approaches in over half the world's 102,000 Protected Areas. Through generations and over hundreds of years, indigenous peoples have successfully used traditional ecological knowledge to manage natural resources, conserve and maintain ecosystems, alleviate poverty, secure adequate supply of food, water, and energy, and adapt to environmental changes.

Too often, indigenous peoples are excluded from meaningful participation in environment and energy policy-making processes and programmes. Such exclusion has served to weaken the impact, cost-effectiveness, and sustainability of initiatives, of funding mechanisms, and programmes implemented by national governments and international development agencies.

UNDP is committed to reversing this trend, and is working through a number of programmes to empower and support local and indigenous initiatives.

The **UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme** has funded over 10,000 projects, locally-initiated and managed in collaboration with NGOs, CBOs, and indigenous groups in 120 countries. Approximately 15% of the funding portfolio goes to projects submitted by indigenous peoples' organizations. Significant efforts have been exerted to increase the use of innovative formats for the submission of project concepts such as through the use of participatory video. For instance, the Baka people in **Eastern Cameroon** are using video cameras with support from UNDP to document how climate change is damaging the forests where they live.

SCP is also implementing a **Community-Based Adaptation to Climate Change Initiative** to pilot local-level climate risk management projects. UNDP is currently supporting the development of 80-200 community driven climate change risk management projects in 10 countries. For instance, in **Guatemala**, projects under development in the Kiché and Mam communities, are focusing on reducing the increasing risks of landslides and soil erosion in the highland agro ecosystems.

UNDP has also been actively engaged in the **Equator Initiative** – a cross-sector partnership that develops the capacity and raises the profile of grassroots efforts to reduce poverty through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. The Equator Initiative has helped more than 1,400 community-based natural resource management initiatives raise their profile, link with technical and business support, and connect with their peers to share best practices. Close to 50 percent of Equator Prize recipients have been indigenous peoples from across the tropics. To name just a few from the Equator Prize 2008: the Yawanawa Agro-extractive Cooperative from Brazil; The Chalalan Eco-lodge from Bolivia; and the Union of Farming and Indigenous Organizations of Cotacachi from Ecuador.

The **UN-REDD Programme** – aiming to contribute to the development of capacity for **reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD)** – is a collaborative effort between UNDP, the United Nations Environment Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization that also supports the international dialogue for the inclusion of a REDD mechanism in a post-2012 climate regime. UN-REDD is investing substantial energy to ensure that indigenous peoples are included as key stakeholders in the process, and that the REDD mechanism benefits and empowers local and indigenous

communities. UNDP has played a lead role developing the "Operational Guidance on the Engagement of Indigenous Peoples and other Forest Communities" which will be presented at a consultation side event on Wednesday, 27 May.

Throughout these and other initiatives, the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of indigenous women remains crucial. To offer just a few examples, UNDP is supporting the Government of **Namibia** to enhance legal protection of San women against gender-based violence and improving their access to the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS. The UNDP Regional Programme on Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Development in **Asia** is training indigenous women on decision-making to address the power dynamics that exist in their communities. For instance, UNDP in **Bangladesh** has helped set up 450 women's groups, empowering and allowing them to develop their own community-based projects and setting up a grass-roots leaders' network.

In the area of democratic governance, **The Inter-Parliamentary Union–UNDP Initiative** is working to promote the effective representation of indigenous peoples in parliaments. In **Burundi**, UNDP has provided support to the Associations of Batwas to develop small and medium-sized enterprise projects for income generation.

All of this is inspired and by the historic **UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**. This declaration guides our engagement with indigenous peoples.

UNDP is fully committed to implementing the **United Nations Development Group (UNDG) Guidelines on Indigenous Peoples Issues** of February 2008 and supporting programme country governments in the identification and formulation of more targeted initiatives together with promoting policies for the integration of indigenous rights in programmatic interventions, including the principle of free, prior and informed consent.

Not only do indigenous peoples often belong to the most marginalized populations in society, being disproportionately represented among those at risk of not achieving the MDGs; in too many instances they continue to be worst affected by development projects that are not sensitive to their unique situations and needs.

In this Second International Decade of Indigenous Peoples and in the context of the UN Declaration, we need to match words with decisive action.

To this aim, and in the spirit of "Delivering as One UN", UNDP, the International Labor Organization and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, are jointly exploring the possibility of establishing a **Global Indigenous Peoples' Partnership** which would, through participatory mechanisms, offer a framework to support programme country governments in strengthening national capacities towards the implementation of legal standards contained in the Declaration and the ILO Convention 169.

UNDP welcomes that the theme of the Permanent Forum for next year is "Development with Culture and Identity". We hope to work closely with you and the UN Inter-Agency Support Group to the Permanent Forum in this dialogue. The year 2010 marks a number of key milestones in international development. It

is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the launch of the UNDP Human Development Report, the ten-year review of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, as well as "Beijing + 15" on the position and equal rights of women.

Once again, I look forward to greater engagement and partnership. UNDP will continue to play an instrumental role in ensuring that your voices are heard loudly and clearly and contribute to local, national and global human development.

*My UNDP colleagues here are ready to respond to your questions or concerns, and we look forward to a good interaction.*

Thank You.