

Above photo L-R: Members of the Article 8 (j) Advisory Group with the CBD Executive Secretary; Erjen C. Khamaganova (Russian Federation), Marianne Jensen (Denmark/Greenland), Lucy Mulenkei (Kenya), Ahmed Djoghlaif, CBD Executive Secretary, Jannie Lasimbag (Malaysia), Sonia Smalacombe (UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues Secretariat), Gladman Chibememe (Zimbabwe) and Sandy Gauntlett (New Zealand). Photo Courtesy of ENB/IISD RS

Pachamama Traditional Knowledge Newsletter

Editorial
By the Executive Secretary, Dr. Ahmed Djoghlaif

Indigenous and local communities are core partners in the successful implementation of the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity. This is evidenced both in the Preamble and in Article 8(j) and other provisions of the Convention, as well as in the first decision (Decision I/9, Annex 6.5) made by the Conference of the Parties to have a distinct programme of work for the knowledge innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities.

The importance of the participation of indigenous and local communities in the work of the Convention is also evidenced by the fact that the Secretariat has two dedicated staff members on this issue and that a voluntary fund has been established to support the participation of indigenous and local communities in meetings of the Convention. The CBD is the only Convention to have such a mechanism.

Furthermore, in Decision IV/9, the Parties established the *Ad Hoc* Open

Ended Working Group on Article 8(j) and related provisions, which is unique within the United Nations system and is regarded as a best practice for the effective participation of indigenous and local communities.

Now that the Convention is entering a new enhanced implementation stage, the engagement of indigenous and local communities is, more than ever, crucial to its success.

In this regard, the recent establishment of a voluntary fund – now fully operational - is a major step forward in ensuring their effective participation.

Also, as major tools for the enhanced implementation of the Convention and the engagement of indigenous and local communities, I have overseen the revitalization of the Convention's webpage, including the homepage for Article 8(j) and the Traditional Knowledge Information Portal, which will provide both resources and electronic communication tools to as-

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sist indigenous and local communities in networking and capacity building on the implementation of the Convention. This will also facilitate information sharing, the sharing of experiences and building of partnerships, which will complement the enhanced efforts of the international community to achieve the 2010 Biodiversity Target.

It is in this spirit that the SCBD newsletter on Article 8(j) has been launched. In my capacity as the Executive Secretary, I am very pleased to present the first issue and to invite indigenous and local communities to use it as a tool of enhanced communication. □

Traditional knowledge and biodiversity: a road to success

Since its inception in 1992 the Convention on Biological Diversity has attracted almost universal adherence. At present, 190 Parties (189 States and the European Union) have signed or ratified it. The Biosafety Protocol, relating to transboundary biotechnology products transfer, entered into force on 11 September 2003 and 140 countries have subscribed to its provisions.

Biological diversity, or biodiversity, is defined in article 2 of the Convention as the “variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.” For the general public, the Convention is best understood as “the Convention for Life on Earth” – for biodiversity comprises all plants and animals on the planet.

To stem the tide of biodiversity loss that the Earth is witnessing, the Convention has three main objectives: – to conserve biodiversity, to promote the sustainable use of its components, and to promote the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the use of its genetic resources (excluding human genetic resources).

In order to implement these objectives, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention (COP) established seven thematic programmes to guide future work through specific vision and principles, each corresponding to a major biome on Earth. They are: forest biodiversity, agricultural biodiversity, marine and coastal biodiversity, inland waters biodiversity, dryland biodiversity, island biodiversity and mountain biodiversity.

Seventeen cross-cutting issues were also initiated. Traditional knowledge is one of these key cross-cutting issues and provides bridges and links across the thematic areas to help to identify

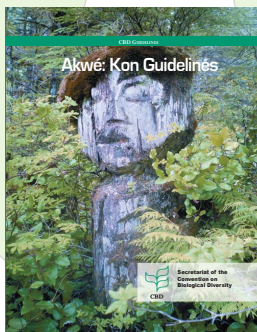
potential outcomes and set a timetable for achieving these goals.

The link between biodiversity and traditional knowledge is evident. Most biodiversity-rich areas are also inhabited by indigenous and/or local communities. Their close dependence on biological resources and the sustainable management and use of these resources can protect and often enhance biodiversity. Their cultures and cosmologies are therefore essential in the global effort to halt biodiversity loss and natural habitat destruction.

Hence, the Convention, in Article 8, paragraph (j) asserts the need to respect, preserve and maintain the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities, and promote their wider application with the approval of the holders of such knowledge, and to share equitably the benefits arising from their utilization.

Given the importance of the task, a Working Group on Article 8(j) and related provisions was established in 1998 by the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 4). At its fifth meeting in 2000, the COP adopted a programme of work that focuses on issues central to enhancing indigenous and local communities’ role and involvement in achieving biodiversity protection and equitable sharing.

The Akwé: Kon¹ Voluntary Guidelines



Adopted by COP 7 (2004), the Akwé: Kon Voluntary Guidelines provide a process for the conduct

¹ The Voluntary guidelines were name given by the Kahnawake community near Montreal Canada, where the guidelines were negotiated. This community suggested a holistic Mohawk term Akwé: Kon pronounced “agway-goo”, which means “everything in creation”, so as to emphasize the holistic nature of this instrument.

of cultural, environmental and social impact assessments regarding developments proposed to take place on, or which are likely to impact on, sacred sites and on lands and waters traditionally occupied or used by indigenous and local communities.

(see: CBD Website <http://www.biodiv.org/doc/publications/akwe-brochure-en.pdf>)

The current work programme for Article 8(j)

Major elements in the current biennial programme of work (2006-2008) for Article 8(j) include: developing technical guidelines for documenting traditional knowledge; research into indigenous and local communities highly vulnerable to climate change; and measures to protect the rights of indigenous and local communities living in voluntary isolation. The work programme also focuses on developing indicators for the retention of traditional knowledge, and methods and measures to address the underlying causes of the loss of such knowledge; providing views on the development of an International Regime on Access to Genetic Resources and Benefit-Sharing relevant to traditional knowledge, as well as the development of a Code of Ethical Conduct to ensure respect for the cultural and intellectual heritage of indigenous and local communities. The plan of action for the retention of traditional knowledge includes the further development of *sui generis* systems (unique) to protect traditional knowledge based on customary laws of indigenous peoples.

The role of Indigenous and local communities

Indigenous and local communities must be actively involved in the development of the programme of work and in its implementation if it is to be successful and useful to them. At COP 8 in March 2006, participants included more than 1,000 NGOs, including 348 indigenous organizations. The effec-

tive participation of diverse indigenous and local communities both within or outside government delegations helps to ensure that decisions meet the concerns of all stakeholders.

Update: New dates for submission of inputs on Traditional Knowledge issues

A decision adopted at the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 8) contains a number of important issues to be addressed prior to the fifth meeting of the *Ad Hoc* Open-ended Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions. Some of these important issues to be addressed as per decision VIII/5, Article 8(j) and related provisions, are development of the Plan of Action for the retention of Traditional Knowledge with a focus on mechanisms and measures to address the underlying causes for the decline of traditional knowledge.

Parties, other governments, indigenous and local communities and non-governmental organizations have been invited to submit views on the aforementioned matters no later than 30 May 2007. However, late submissions will be accepted where possible. By receiving input from interested parties in advance, the Secretariat will ensure that the submissions received are properly reflected in the documentation for the meeting, which will be made available three months before the meeting.

As the Secretariat is currently engaged in preparations for the Fifth Meeting of the *Ad Hoc* Open-Ended Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions, the Secretariat looks forward to receiving the inputs and contributions of all interested parties. The CBD encourages, in particular, the effective participation and involvement of indigenous and local communities in policy development and decision-making relating to the protection and promotion of their traditional knowledge and practices relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. □



Above photo: Indigenous participants at COP 8, Curitiba, Brazil. Photo courtesy of ENB/ IISD RS.



Above photo: Taba Community Village at COP 8, Curitiba, Brazil. Photo courtesy of ENB/ IISD RS



Above photo: Indigenous elder at COP 8, Curitiba, Brazil. Photo courtesy of ENB/ IISD RS.



Above photo: Indigenous crafts at COP 8, Curitiba, Brazil. Photo courtesy of ENB/ IISD RS.

Article 8 (j) CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April-May 2007:

30 April - 3 May
Montreal, Canada

Meeting of the Article 8(j) Advisory Group

14- 25 May
UN Headquarters
New York, United States

6th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

October 2007:

8-12 October
Montreal, Canada

Fifth meeting of the *Ad Hoc* Open-ended Working Group on Access and Benefit-sharing (ABSWG-5)

15-19 October
Montreal, Canada

Fifth meeting of the *Ad Hoc* Open-ended Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions (WG8J-5)

Tentative Meetings:

August 2007

Article 8 (j) /CHM Capacity Building Workshop
Tentative venue: Eastern Europe
Date: TBD

September 2007

Annual meeting of the UN Interagency Support Group on Indigenous Issues (IASG)
Tentative venue: Montreal, Canada
Date: TBD

November 2007

Article 8(j) and Tourism Workshop
Tentative venue: Quebec City, Canada
Date: TBD

December 2007

Article 8(j)/CHM Capacity Building Workshop
Tentative venue: Africa
Date: TBD

For the complete list and updated information on SCBD meetings, please consult the SCBD Calendar of Meetings on line at:
<http://www.biodiv.org/meetings/default.shtml>

Indigenous and Local Communities – the Human Face of Climate Change

This year's theme for the International Day for Biological Diversity, which will be celebrated on 22 May, is "Climate Change and Biodiversity".

The Secretariat is working to provide indigenous and local community perspectives on this theme by promoting the human face to the climate change crises. This complements the designation of 2007 as the International Polar Year, and coincides with UNEP'S World Environment Day theme of Climate Change.

Parties to the Convention recognized the specific vulnerabilities of indigenous and local communities in such regions as the Arctic, small islands and high altitudes and, in decision VIII/5, requested the Executive Secretary to conduct research into and prepare a report on this issue. The commissioned report will provide the basis for recommendations emerging from the Working Group on Article 8(j) this year, as well as the basis for a travelling exhibition, which is scheduled for New York and Paris.

22 May 2007

International Day for Biological Diversity



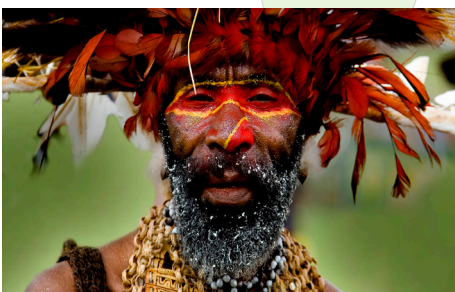
Biodiversity and Climate Change

The exhibition will take place during the 6th session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 14-25 May 2007, as part of the annual indigenous cultural exhibit facilitated by the UN Department of Public Information at United Nations Headquarters, in New York. The exhibit will remain on display for approximately two months at the public entrance of UN Headquarters after which it will be sent to UNESCO, Paris, to be reassembled for display during the UNESCO General Conference, October-November 2007. As UN Headquarters attracts almost one million visitors annually, this 2 month display over Spring

and Summer has the potential to reach almost 200,000 visitors as well as more than 1,000 indigenous peoples who participate in the UNPFII's annual meeting, as well as participants in the UNESCO General Conference.

Indigenous and local communities will be disproportionately affected by climate change both because of poverty and because of their close and long term association with their traditional lands and waters. The report will focus on both causes and solutions recognizing that traditional knowledge and healthy ecosystems can mitigate against the impacts of climate change and indigenous and local communities have a crucial role to play in addressing this impending crisis. □

For further information regarding the International Day for Biological Diversity, please visit <http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/outreach/awareness/biodiv-day-2007.shtml>



Papu man, Papua New Guinea.
Photo courtesy of Eric Lafforgue



Kuna elder of Panama.
Photo courtesy of Francisco Yera.



Inuit man, Arctic.
Photo courtesy of Jerry Hollens



Papu tribesmen, Papua New Guinea.
Photo courtesy of Eric Lafforgue



Ifugao elder with an inviting smile, Philippines.
Photo courtesy of Poch Ceballos.



Inuit woman hunting for Tom Cod, United States
Photo courtesy of US Fish and Wildlife Service.

International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB) Initiative on Indicators

During the fourth meeting of the CBD's Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions, held in January 2006 in Granada, Spain, indigenous peoples organizations, under the umbrella of the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB), created the IIFB Working Group on Indicators. The Working Group was created to respond to the urgent need to identify and test indicators relevant to the implementation of the Strategic Plan for the Convention on Biological Diversity and its framework for monitoring achievement of the 2010 Biodiversity Target (CBD Decisions VI/26 and VII/30). The IIFB Working Group on Indicators appointed the well-known indigenous activist, Joji Cariño, as its chairperson.



Above photo: Joji Cariño, IIFB
Photo courtesy of ENB/ IISD RS

The IIFB Working Group on Indicators proposed the convening of an International Expert Seminar to consider, in a holistic and integrated manner, the development of a limited number of meaningful indicators, in identified thematic areas:

- Traditional Knowledge, Innovations and Practices
- Customary sustainable use (Article 10(c))
- Maintaining goods and services acquired out of biodiversity to support human well-being (Biodiversity and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals)
- Effective participation of Indigenous and Local Communities in the CBD processes
- Processes at national, regional and international levels

The eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention recognized the need for a structured technical process to guide further work in the *Ad Hoc* Open Ended Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions on further development of a limited number of meaningful and practical indicators. Thus in decision VIII/5G, paragraph 5, the COP welcomed the initiative of the IIFB Working Group on Indicators to organize an International Expert Seminar on Indicators.

The strategy of the IIFB initiative involves the facilitation of a series of regional consultations feeding into the International Expert Seminar on Indicators, which was held from 5-9 March, 2007 in Banaue, Ifugao, the Philippines.

The International Expert Seminar and some of the regional consultations were sponsored by interested governments including Spain, Norway and Sweden, Swedbio and interested NGOs (including the Christensen Fund). Organized by the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB) Working Group on Indicators, in close collaboration with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the meeting brought together diverse participants from among indigenous peoples, local communities, governments, international organizations, and regional and national institutions. The results of the workshop provide possible indicators that could greatly assist towards the over-all assessment of progress towards goals and targets of the CBD Strategic Plan and 2010 Target. The Report of the expert meeting also constitutes an important resource on Indicators Relevant to Indigenous Peoples, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Millennium Development Goals.

In the lead-up to the International Expert Seminar on Indicators, a series of regional consultations were held. In particular, a regional consultation for the Asia region took place in Calapan, Mindoro, Philippines on 8-10 No-

vember, 2006, a regional consultation for the Latin America and Caribbean region was held in Quito, Ecuador on 11-13 December, 2006 and a regional consultation for the Pacific was held in Brisbane immediately after the international seminar on 12-14 March 2007.

Other related initiatives include the Workshop on Customary Sustainable Use Indicators: a Contribution towards the Development of Indicators in the CBD, which was facilitated by the Forest Peoples Programme, held on 19-21 September, 2006 in London, England. The report of the meeting, attended by representatives of indigenous organizations and some NGOs, fed into the regional consultation processes and the International Expert Seminar on Indicators.

The International Seminar has produced a report and recommendations for the consideration of the fifth meeting of the *Ad Hoc* Open-Ended Working Group for Article 8(j) and Related Provisions, which is scheduled to meet in Montreal, on 15-19 October, 2007. The Working Group on Article 8(j) will consider the report and recommendations within the broad context of its work programme and adopt recommendations for consideration of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, scheduled for May 2008 in Bonn, Germany.

COP 9 will take into consideration the outcomes of this comprehensive process and make decisions about the adoption of practical indicators, that can measure progress towards the protection of the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities. Thanks to the development of a suite of indicators other important areas such as sustainable use and effective participation can be measured along with progress towards the 2010 Biodiversity Target, "to significantly reduce the current rate of loss of biological diversity by 2010". □

Sacred Sites: Our Pain, Hope and Strength

by Erjen Khamaganova



In my native Buryat language, the process of education is called “khu-muuzhulekhe,” from the word “khun” – human. It literally means the process of

helping a person to become human. One of the most important aspects of being “human” in my native understanding is the ability to comprehend the world in the entirety of complex interconnectedness and interrelations of events, phenomena and actions. Sacred sites in Buryat culture are the embodiment of these interrelations and are a major “educational tool” to realize oneself as a human being, and as a part of an endless whole. The first sacred site to a Buryat child is his toonto, the place where a baby is born and where his/her placenta is buried. Through a special ceremony, the upper and lower worlds are informed that a new person is born in the middle world. Where else if not in this particular place where one enters the world could one experience this insurmountable connection to Mother Earth, altan ulgii “the golden cradle,” and feel the ties with one’s own ancestors?

More and more people are recognizing the correlation between the spiritual work of a native person in a sacred place and the corresponding higher level of biodiversity associated with such sites. The devout attitude of native persons to sacred places and both their inability and impossibility to destroy the inherent harmony of these places, has created conditions for the conservation of biodiversity. Sacred sites are the cornerstone of our cultures, worldviews and native philosophies, not mere conservation activities. The efforts of indigenous peoples to protect biodiversity and to preserve our cultures are interconnected and inseparable. Rare species of flora and fauna exist today by virtue of their special place in tradi-

tional cultures and their protection and regeneration within sacred sites. In the course of centuries, indigenous people have been protecting sacred sites with special care and thus protecting and promoting sacred birds and animals, sacred plants and trees and associated landforms and waterscapes.

Our sacred Lake Baikal (between Northern Mongolia and South Western Russia) — the oldest and deepest lake in the world – is home to more than three thousand species, almost half of which are endemic to the area. Buryat clans connect their origins directly with Baikal and trace their lineage to natural forefathers — the animals and trees of the lake. This high degree of diversity of life forms in sacred sites could be explained by the fact that sacred sites are places of origin of certain families or clans, and have been protected because many of these forms are believed to be our ancestors. The forefather of Ekhirts is Gutar, the Eel-Pot fish from the lake. My clan’s ancestor from my mother’s side is Khongodor, the White Swan, the bird that comes every spring to the lake. The forefather of Bulagats is Bukha Noen, the Grey Bull. There are also Birch clans, Eagle clans, Wolf clans, and many others. These plants and animals are our brothers and sisters – our ancestors.

In a modern reality, a sacred place is one of the only special arenas where indigenous peoples can educate their children (help children become more “human”) in native ways. The forms and methods of education and transmission of traditional indigenous knowledge on these places are unique; they are a common heritage of each particular indigenous nation. They help us understand modern reality and traditional life better and are indeed the “mechanisms” for ensuring continuation of our sacred sites. Sacred sites are in turn the “mechanisms” for ensuring the continuation of indigenous persons as humans and indigenous peoples as peoples with distinct identities, philosophies

and worldviews. However, the reality is such, that as we face broader problems of the destruction of Buryat native identity, we also experience the destruction of many sacred sites and vice-versa – they are interconnected. Destruction of sacred sites in turn contributes to further destruction of Buryat identity and the loss of biodiversity.

I have tried to articulate very serious concepts of what sacred sites are for an indigenous person and why it is important to preserve and protect sacred sites. I am pleased to present some thoughts about how UN agencies could assist in protecting indigenous sacred sites.

1. Sacred Sites as World Heritage and Indigenous Peoples

In the Russian Federation, four out of five World Natural Heritage Sites are sacred sites for local indigenous peoples. However, the UNESCO World Heritage Site status does not help indigenous peoples nor save sacred sites. Indigenous peoples are the ones who have saved many of the significant sites that are now recognized as World Heritage Sites through their own “mechanisms”, without any assistance from the State or, in many cases, despite pressure from the States and from dominating cultures. In today’s reality, from my own experience, I can say that on our World Heritage Sites – Lake Baikal and the Golden Mountains of Altai, the ecological nihilism of the incoming population is “balanced” in many ways only by native traditions and efforts of indigenous communities to protect their sacred sites. For example, the recent decision by President Putin to divert the construction of the oil pipeline 40 km away from Lake Baikal is the result of the active resistance of Russian civil society with significant input from indigenous and local communities, including through special ceremonies and rituals. It is unfortunate that UNESCO and other UN bodies seem to underestimate the potential of indigenous communities to

contribute to the promotion of a new environmentally-sound world culture. It is time to expand the scope of the concept of World Heritage to include specific provisions related to indigenous peoples and their knowledge. Such international bodies as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues could initiate, in collaboration with UNESCO, ways and means of establishing a network of indigenous knowledge on sacred sites of the World Heritage. Furthermore, "World Heritage" nomination should be supported by both the empowerment of the local indigenous peoples to continue to protect the site, as well as adequate resources, including funding to address its continued protection.

2. Sacred Sites and Rights for Traditional Education and Up-Bringing

Protection of sacred sites is inseparable from issues of self-determination and indigenous collective rights, including the right of a native child to receive traditional education and develop skills to retain and develop traditional indigenous knowledge, and to thus fully acquire the rich wealth of her own culture. However, the unique ways of transferring this knowledge are under threat. Modern curricula in schools are far detached from the essence of native pedagogy. UNPFII, UNICEF, UNESCO and the CBD could play a major role in developing guidelines for the member states regarding the protection and promotion of traditional indigenous knowledge in education, including traditional pedagogies. In no case should such guidelines diminish the cultural diversity of indigenous peoples or try to impose detailed uniform regulations on every indigenous nation – indigenous diversity should be respected above all. Such guidelines could stress the importance of the diversity of unique techniques of intergenerational transmission of knowledge. These forms and methods of education must be at least as diverse as are indigenous peoples, and should be based on the fundamental principles of native philosophy that are embodied in the sacred sites – non-violence and peace. The special role of indigenous

women in native pedagogy should also be emphasized. Finally, the keystone of the guidelines should be recognition of the rights of children to know and practice our traditional knowledge, to live in and to protect and develop our culture.

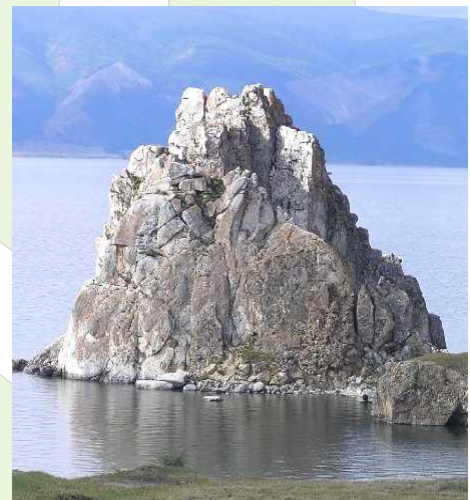
3. Sacred Sites and Development

Akwé: Kon Voluntary Guidelines for the Conduct of Cultural, Environmental and Social Impact Assessment regarding Developments Proposed to Take Place on, Sacred Sites and on Lands and Waters Traditionally Occupied or Used by Indigenous and Local Communities should be further promoted as a global framework for the protection of sacred sites and their biodiversity. For local and native communities, these guidelines constitute a very useful tool by providing a good system for ensuring collaboration of indigenous and local communities in the assessment of cultural, spiritual, environmental and social impacts of proposed development on sacred sites. We would love to see such a document be legally binding and thus requiring our governments to consider indigenous views. We understand this may be possible in a distant future, but right now, the Akwé: Kon Guidelines is one of the very few documents that address the issues of sacred sites from a truly indigenous perspective. The CBD and UNPFII should take further steps to promote the implementation of the Akwé: Kon Guidelines among state parties.

4. Sacred Sites and Healthy Ways of Life

Every indigenous nation has created its own system of promoting healthy ways of life. The development of these indigenous health systems over millennia has shaped our unique knowledge, reflecting the environmental conditions of the given locality and the specificity of human economies. Sacred sites in these systems have always played a particularly important role. When entering a sacred place, a person who is properly educated in the indigenous way does not break any taboos and finds him/herself under the patronage of the

spiritual owners of that place. A person, being constantly under pressure from everyday routine, upon entering the sacred place finally gets an opportunity to be simply him/herself. The feeling of finding refuge and protection has a tremendously favourable effect on the human mind, body and soul. Today, many of us are dealing with problems of alcoholism and loss of spiritual and physical balance in our communities. Preservation of sacred sites is a key way to restore traditions of a healthy way of life, healthy diet and healthy habits in forms that are unique and suitable for each region and each indigenous nation. The UNPFII, together with UN Department for Sport and Development and the World Health Organization, could initiate special programs of indigenous health based on the spiritual dimension of healthy lifestyles, embodied in our sacred sites. □



Sacred rock formation on Lake Baikal known as Burhan to the Buryat peoples, Siberia, Russian Federation
Photo courtesy of Donald Kozzak/www.flickr.com

Erjen Khmaganova is currently Chair of the Buryat Baikal Center for Indigenous Cultures and is a member of the Advisory Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity. She can be reached at erjen99@gmail.com.

Linking networks, Sharing ideas on Biological and Cultural Diversity

by Ahmed Djoghlaf, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity



Federico Fellini said: "Every language sees the world differently" and the world-famous linguist David Crystal liked to say that "the world is a mosaic of vi-

sions and each vision is captured in a language. Every time a language is lost, a vision of the world disappears". According to UNESCO, approximately 600 languages have disappeared in the last century and they continue to disappear at a rate of one language every two weeks. There are currently 6,700 languages, 40% of which are threatened with extinction and more than 90% of which are likely to disappear before the end of this century. There is therefore a danger that 90% of the visions of this world will disappear.

A language is not only a technical means of communication between human beings. It is also a vehicle for expressing emotions and transferring cultural, social, ethical and spiritual values. Uniting communities, language is an integral part of their distinct identity, heritage and integrity. A language is also and above all a treasure of ancestral knowledge and a real living encyclopedia of traditional knowledge, passed down, orally in the majority of cases, from one generation to another. Through the centuries, the peoples of the world, the indigenous populations in particular, have accumulated traditional knowledge of irreplaceable value that is disappearing as ancient tongues become extinct. This is particularly true, as in most traditional cultures, knowledge is transferred orally, being neither written nor recorded.

This has led some to say that every time a language disappears, it is

as though a bomb had dropped on a museum. I would like to add that every time a language disappears, it is as though a bomb had been dropped on nature, its peoples and its cultures. Linguistic erosion is accompanied by an erosion of biodiversity and is often a reflection thereof. The anthropologist Earl Shorris said in 2000: "There are 9 different Maya words for the colour blue in the Porrua Spanish-Maya dictionary, but only 3 Spanish translations, leaving six butterflies that can only be seen by the Mayas, which proves that when a language dies, six butterflies disappear from the Earth's consciousness." Since the beginning of time, human beings have used more than 7,000 species of plants to meet their needs. Today, only 150 plants are used and most of us only use 12 species. Thus, 95% of the 8,000 species of apple to be found in the United States of America until the last century have disappeared.

There is an inherent link between linguistic and cultural diversity and biological diversity. Milan Kundera said that "culture is the memory of the people, the collective consciousness of historic continuity, the way of thinking and living". Linguistic erosion is therefore a corrosive element of collective memory and of the identity and integrity of human communities; it is also a manifestation of the loss of biological diversity. Languages, such as we know them today, are the result of an age-old evolution. It is believed that they first appeared in Africa more than 150,000 years ago and spread around the world. Language is an integral part of the cultural and civilization heritage of the peoples of the world. Biological diversity is also the result of millions of years of evolution of life on Earth. It represents all forms of life on Earth. Ecosystems provide the essential needs of life, protection from natural disasters and diseases and constitute the very foundation of human culture.

Ecosystems and life on Earth, including its cultural, spiritual and ethical dimension, are therefore co-substantial.

However, the "Millennium Ecosystem Assessment", a study carried out by 1,395 experts from 95 countries, has shown that, since their appearance on Earth, human beings have never destroyed the foundations of their life as much as during the last fifty years. The pressures exerted on the planet's natural functions by human activity have reached such a level that the ability of ecosystems to meet the needs of future generations is now seriously, and perhaps irretrievably, compromised. Changes in the Earth's natural functions caused by human activity have never been as destructive as during the past fifty years, leading to an unequalled extinction of biodiversity.

The extinction rate of animal and plant species is 30% higher than the natural rate. It is now a thousand times higher than it was a hundred years ago. During the last 500 years, species became extinct at the rate of 1,000 species per annum. Today, between 15,000 and 50,000 species disappear each year. Twenty per cent of known birds are already extinct; 41% of mammals are in decline and 28% are directly threatened.

Up to a recent past, 47% of the Earth's surface was covered in forest. Since then, it has completely vanished in 25 countries and only 10% remains in 29 others. Ten million hectares of forests continue to disappear each year, the equivalent of an area four times larger than Belgium. It is a well-established fact that tropical forests are the richest ecosystems in terms of biodiversity. Although they only represent 7% of the world's surface, tropical forests currently house 50 to 70% of identified living species. They

Continued on page 9

are also the richest areas in cultural diversity, with 1,400 to 2,500 different indigenous peoples representing 54% of the world's ecoregions and 36% of the total number of ethno-linguistic groups.

A recent WWF study identified 900 ecoregions in the world, 200 of which are considered to be of strategic importance for the protection of biological diversity. The study demonstrates in great detail the correlation between the biodiversity distribution map and that of linguistic and therefore cultural diversity. Languages are one of the essential characteristics of the cultural diversity of the people of the world. Six out of nine countries representing 60% of the number of recorded languages are also biodiversity hot spots. Ten out of the twelve richest countries in biodiversity are among the 25 richest countries in endemic languages. Indonesia, for example, has the second highest number of indigenous languages, the highest number of indigenous birds and the fourth highest number of vertebrates. This country made up of a hundred thousand islands also has the seventh highest number of plants identified in the world.

The 200 ecoregions identified by WWF comprise 4,635 ethno-linguistic groups representing 67% of the 6,867 ethno-linguistic groups classed as indigenous populations. Representing around 300 million people or less than 5% of the world population, indigenous communities are the holders and guardians of an invaluable biological and cultural wealth as well as exceptional ancestral knowledge.

Nature conservation is at the heart of the cultures and values of traditional societies. Indigenous communities have an umbilical relationship with nature, which is considered to be a whole, with humankind as its central nucleus. As such, the Earth is the "spiritual mother" who not only gives life and therefore food, but also provides the cultural and spiritual identity of its occupants. Because it has been handed down by our ancestors like a sacred legacy, it must be protected in order to bequeath it to future generations, as a

gift blessed by the gods. Based on this principle, all creation is sacred and nature is divine and should be respected and revered. Indigenous populations such as the Koguis – which literally means 'inhabitants of the Earth' – believe that human beings do not own the Earth, but that is the Earth, considered to be a gift from God, that owns them and looks after them.

The sacred nature of the Earth and its benefits is central to almost all religions in the world. There is an inherent relation between religion and the environment. The humanist and pacifist Theodore Monod argued in his written works that "we must learn to respect life in all its forms: none of these grasses, none of these flowers, none of these animals should be destroyed without a reason, for they too are all creatures of God". Through the ages and civilizations, religion has always played a central role in protecting the environment. This was demonstrated, with ample evidence, at the Symposium on "Religions and the Environment" held in Tehran, Iran, in June 2001, to the organization of which I had the remarkable honour of contributing, as the representative of the United Nations Environment Programme.

Since time immemorial, sacred natural sites have been a valuable instrument of environmental conservation. The respect for gifts from nature deemed to be sacred and therefore subject to social access restrictions and regulations has greatly contributed to the protection of areas that are particularly rich in biodiversity. Sacred sites are seen to unite nature, culture and spiritual and ethical values. A study of 10 sacred sites in the island of Timor revealed the existence of 189 plant species although only 46 had been identified in neighbouring areas. Sacred sites encompass a variety ecosystems and landscapes. For some communities in Japan, Madagascar, Mongolia, Sri Lanka and elsewhere, mountains are considered sacred. Mount Fuji is a perfect example. For others, rivers, lakes, forests or mangroves are sacred

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Papu peoples, Papua New Guinea.
Photo courtesy of Eric Lafforgue.



Karo woman by the Omo river, Ethiopia.
Photo courtesy of Michael Sheridan.



Saami family, Norway
Photo courtesy of theshortsphotos/www.flickr.com



Woman drying fish, Myanmar.
Photo courtesy of Eric Lafforgue.

*Linking...**(continuation) From page 9*

elements. Such is the case of the Kaya forests in Kenya, the rivers in Zagne in south-west Côte d'Ivoire, the sacred mangroves in Ghana, the Atacama desert in Chile, the sacred Agathy-aekuramnekae region in Sikkim in India or the Huascarán site in Peru.

For this reason, the Convention on Biological Diversity pays particular attention to the relation between biological diversity and cultural diversity, with special emphasis on indigenous and local communities. In its preamble, this "convention on life on Earth" recognizes "the close and traditional dependence of many indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles on biological resources and the desirability of sharing equitably benefits arising from the use of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices".

Article 10 provides that the 190 contracting Parties shall "protect and encourage customary use of biological resources in accordance with traditional cultural practices that are compatible with conservation or sustainable use requirements". Article 8(j) requires these same Parties "to respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote the involvement of the holders of such knowledge, innovations and practices and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge, innovations and practices". Therefore, when the Convention came into force on 29 December 1993, the contracting Parties paid particular attention to preserving and maintaining the heritage of indigenous populations. At the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Nassau, Bahamas, in December 1994, a dedicated post was created in the Secretariat for the implementation of Article 8 (j). Later on, the Conference of the Parties established a working group on Article 8 (j), which has now

been raised to the status of subsidiary body and has held four meetings. The United Nations Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples upholds in many of its provisions, Article 31 in particular, the umbilical relationship that unites the protection of traditional knowledge and the preservation of the cultural identity and integrity of indigenous peoples.

The link between biological and cultural diversity is also enshrined in many important texts adopted by UNESCO. In adopting the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity in 2001, member countries reaffirmed their conviction that cultural diversity is one of the roots of development and that it is "as necessary to the human species as biodiversity is to nature". The principle of the complementarity of economic and cultural aspects of development is one of the guiding principles of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Principle 5 of this unique convention recognizes that "since culture is one of the mainsprings of development, the cultural aspects of development are as important as its economic aspects, which individuals and peoples have the fundamental right to participate in and enjoy". The principle of sustainable development is also a guiding principle of this convention, which recognizes that "Cultural diversity is a rich asset for individuals and societies. The protection, promotion and maintenance of cultural diversity are an essential requirement for sustainable development for the benefit of present and future generations". In adopting this convention, Member States have raised cultural diversity to the status of a "common heritage of humanity", as in ratifying the Convention on Biological Diversity they have recognized that "the conservation of biological diversity is a common concern of humankind".

Whilst in the eighties mechanical economic growth was considered to be the new name of peace, today, peace has a different name, that of sustainable development, which hinges on the economy, the environment,

culture and social issues. Indeed, there could be no sustainable development without the protection of biodiversity, just as there could be no protection of biodiversity without the preservation of the cultural heritage of the peoples of the world, indigenous and local communities, in particular.

I therefore have the pleasure of announcing that a protocol of agreement between the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and UNESCO is under preparation, dealing with key areas of cooperation in fields of education and public awareness, particularly among young people.

On adopting its constitution at the end of the Second World War, the founding fathers of UNESCO were keen to recall that "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed". Today, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions remind us that "since the impoverishment of biological and cultural diversity begins in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of sustainable development must be raised". □



Ifugao elder by the sacred Banaue rice terraces, Philippines. Photo courtesy of Irahmay/www.flickr.com.

Indigenous People and Biodiversity in Quebec

by Benoît Limoges



The Province of Quebec, in Canada, has had a Strategy and Action Plan on Biological Diversity for the past 10 years. These documents can be down-

loaded on the internet at the following addresses: <http://www.mddep.gouv.qc.ca/biodiversite/2004-2007/strategie.pdf> and <http://www.mddep.gouv.qc.ca/biodiversite/2004-2007/planaction.pdf>.

In the Strategy and Action Plan on Biological Diversity for 2004 – 2007, one of the main goals focuses on involving civil society in the conservation of biological diversity, and in particular indigenous communities, youth, non-governmental organizations and local and regional public agencies.

Following this goal, and focusing on the involvement of indigenous communities in Quebec, there are three main strategic objectives. The first objective is to inform indigenous communities about current biodiversity projects and activities. Results have fallen short of expectations regarding this first objective. There was no distribution of the Quebec biodiversity strategy to the indigenous communities of Quebec during the initial year. However, in 2005, Cri, Naskapi and Inuit communities were informed about the Quebec Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan through the Joint Committee on hunting / fishing / trapping.

The second objective aims to encourage the participation of indigenous communities in the conservation of biological diversity. The implementation of this objective is within expectations. In 2004-2005, there were 23 agreements put in place, dealing with the conservation and development of fauna or of the environment. Regarding fauna, the provincial government signed agreements, regarding hunting, fishing and trapping, with indigenous or local communities that

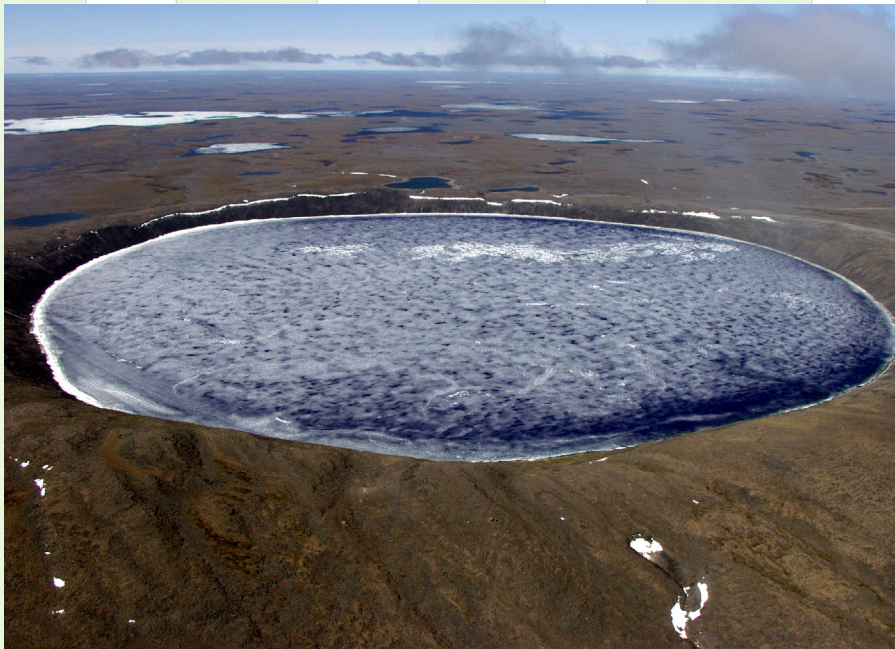
consulted on a yearly basis is increasing because new protected area development projects are being submitted regularly.

More and more national parks are managed either completely or jointly with indigenous communities. Indeed, the ministry in charge of park management has concluded an agreement with the Kativik Regional Government, an Inuit organization, to manage the Pinguiluit National Park, in Nunavik (see picture). Other agree-

ments have been finalized in anticipation of indigenous management of projected national parks in northern Quebec. Moreover, a protected area was recently designed so as to include a stream that constitutes for the Algonquians a river that has been used for centuries to teach children how to operate a canoe.

The third objective is to ensure the survival of traditional knowledge. To this end, 18 comprehensive land claim agreements or framework agreements,

which acknowledge indigenous cultures, were negotiated and concluded. Two more comprehensive land claim agreements have been concluded: the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement and the Northeastern Quebec Agreement. Two more agreements are in negotiation: an Agreement - in Principle of a General Nature with the Innu (Common Approach) and a recent agreement in negotiation with the Attikameks. In these agreements or negotiations, which explicitly recognize indigenous cultures, there are chapters dealing with the environ-



Pinguiluit National Park
Picture credit : Ministry of Sustainable Development, of Environment and Parks of Quebec.

wished to do so. These agreements are meant to encourage access by indigenous communities to wildlife resources, from a perspective of sustainable management of fauna. In the field of environment, agreements are being signed with indigenous communities in order to protect or improve the environment.

There were also ongoing consultations with 13 indigenous communities regarding biodiversity reserves, wetland reserves and ecological reserves, recognizing specific concerns and uses for different protected areas. The number of indigenous communities

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Indigenous...*(continuation) From page 11*

ment and the protection of biodiversity. Furthermore, indigenous cultures are also widely recognized in 14 other framework agreements dealing with various sectoral issues that have been signed by the Government of Quebec.

Indeed, this is a reciprocal acknowledgement from one nation to another. Among the various agreements signed by the Government of Quebec and indigenous communities and recognizing the contribution of First Nations to the conservation of biological and cultural diversity, there is an agreement signed with the Attikameks of Manawan (see website at: http://www.autochtones.gouv.qc.ca/relations_autochtones/ententes/attikameks/manawan/20050118.htm). This agreement was signed in order to put in place a collaborative and consultative mechanism for the establishment of protected areas.

The Framework Agreement between the Government of Quebec and the Montagnais Council of Lac-Saint-Jean, (see website at http://www.autochtones.gouv.qc.ca/relations_autochtones/ententes/innus/20040707.htm) recognizes their respective specificity,

the uniqueness of their culture, of their language, of their rules, customs and traditions and of their national identity. Among others, this agreement enables the active participation of the Montagnais Council in the management of fauna in the Ashuapmushuan Wildlife Reserve and in the Common Wildlife Area of Lac-Saint-Jean. This agreement was signed together with a memorandum of understanding and mutual respect (see website:

http://www.autochtones.gouv.qc.ca/relations_autochtones/ententes/innus/20040707a.htm).

Through this memorandum, both parties are willing to establish a constructive relationship based on each others' principles and respective concepts. "Proud of their culture, their language, their rules, traditions and customs, the Montagnais Council of the St-Jean-Lake and the Government of Quebec agree to negotiate based on a mutual respect of their national identity as well as their history and occupation of the territory.

The Montagnais Council of the Lac-St-Jean and the Government of Quebec also want to participate in development projects as partners". This quote can be found in all framework agree-

ments signed between the Government of Quebec and indigenous communities.

Indigenous communities, as key elements of the conservation of biodiversity, are important partners for the Government of Quebec because they have expressed concern regarding their ancestral territories and their traditional knowledge. By signing off such agreements, the Government of Quebec recognizes and encourages indigenous cultures as an anchor point for the maintenance of biodiversity and cultural diversity, which is an integral part of the Convention on Biological Diversity. According to the terms of this Convention, Parties respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. □

Benoît Limoges is a Coordinator for the Coordination Center for Biodiversity in Quebec within the Direction of Ecological Heritage and Parks Ministry of Sustainable Development, Environment and Parks of Quebec. □



Traditional practices in connection with biodiversity.
Picture credit: Ministry of Sustainable Development, Environment and Parks of Québec.



Strengthening the Indigenous Women's Biodiversity Network in Latin America

by Sofía Gutiérrez



The Fundación para la Promoción del Conocimiento Indígena and the Indigenous Women's Biodiversity Network (IWBN) for Latin America, organized the workshop

"Construyendo propuestas para el fortalecimiento de la Red de Mujeres Indígenas sobre Biodiversidad en Abya Yala" (Constructing proposals for the strengthening of the Indigenous Women's Biodiversity Network in Latin America), which was held in Dad Nakue Dupir, Comarca Kuna Yala, in Panama, from 6 to 8 July 2006.

The meeting took place in the Kuna Yala indigenous community Dad Nakue Dupir (the Spanish name is San Ignacio de Tupile), which is located in the western part of the Caribbean coast of Panama. Participants were warmly greeted by the indigenous Kuna dressed in their traditional indigenous costumes (such as the mola, a form of traditional textile art used by Kuna women) and were introduced to a fascinating indigenous community whose traditional ways of life and customary laws and practices are very much alive. Later on, we were invited to visit some of the religious, cultural and political authorities in the communities and to attend one of the local congresses. Since fish and agriculture are the main subsistence activities in the area we were also treated to daily traditional dishes and beverages. We were indeed privileged to have a meeting in such a remarkable and unique place.

Within a framework of respect for their culture and uniqueness, the

workshop aimed at strengthening the capacity of the organization's members Network on the identification, formulation, negotiation and administration of proposals, projects and initiatives and on increasing their abilities and skills, to support their incorporation, active and sustained participation in national and international development processes within the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The specific objectives of the workshop were:

1. To strengthen the capacity of indigenous women in project preparation that would enable them to propose and develop concrete activities in their countries within the framework of the CBD.
2. Elaboration of a proposal by the



Indigenous women from various Latin American countries in a special ceremony meant as an offering to mother Earth (pachamama). Photo courtesy of Viviana E. Figueroa.

participants, on the basis of identified priorities to be implemented in their respective countries.

3. To strengthen the IWBN as a place of support for indigenous women and their initiatives at the national and international levels.

The meeting had as its origins the interest of indigenous women from various countries from Abya Yala (Latin

America), and members of the IWBN, who have been following the CBD process for some time now. Over the years, through the many events in which they have participated, they have reached a consensus about the role that indigenous women play in the preservation, recovery and conservation of indigenous knowledge. Consequently, this led to a need to develop a joint work plan, and to strengthen the efforts of coordination and participation of indigenous women. The workshop was seen as the beginning of an ambitious process of enhanced participation of indigenous women in the work of the CBD and strengthening of the Indigenous Women's Biodiversity Network in the Latin American region.

The meeting, which was attended by 25 indigenous women from various Latin American countries (Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Panama, Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador and Mexico), as well as a representative of the World Bank, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and other special guests, provided a unique forum in which to address the concerns and challenges regarding the participation of indigenous women in the CBD processes. Among the key elements identified were the strengths, opportunities and weaknesses of a full and effective participation of women. As a result, the Women's Biodiversity

Network for Latin America, as a forum for capacity building and information and experience sharing on biodiversity related issues, was consolidated which led to a concrete action plan. The Network also reorganized its mission, vision, working committees approved, and responsibilities assigned, in order to move forward.

Continued on page 15

How can Indigenous and Local Communities participate in the work of the Convention?

Mechanisms for the full and effective participation of indigenous and local communities in meetings held under the Convention, and in particular, in the *Ad Hoc* open-ended Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions, have been established within the framework of the Convention. These mechanisms range from financial support to enable indigenous and local communities to attend the meetings, to logistical support during meetings, as well as participation in formal and informal groups (such as contact groups and Friends of the Chair groups) and opportunities for capacity-building. The effective participation practices established by the Convention on Biological Diversity and specifically within the Working Group on Article 8(j) are viewed as a good practice model for the rest of the United Nations system.

The Executive Secretary Dr. Ahmed Djoghlaif, in his inaugural address to indigenous and local communities, in January 2006, has recognised that Chapter 26 of Agenda 21, adopted at the Rio Summit in 1992, called for the strengthening of the role of indigenous and local communities in promoting sustainable development including its biodiversity component.

He also noted that, "The Convention on Biological Diversity is one of the major international movements to recognize the role of indigenous and local communities in conserving and ensuring the sustainable use of biodiversity including through traditional knowledge. This recognition is enshrined in the preamble of the convention as well as its Article 8(j). As the Convention has begun an exciting phase of enhanced implementation, indigenous and local communities, as one of its major stakeholders, have a major role to play. The battle to protect life on Earth is also yours and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, will always be on your side, as your faithful partner.

Your participation in the process of the Convention and its implementation is central. We cannot complete our work without your involvement."

The Secretariat looks forward to receiving your input into the work of the Convention and building a partnership that ensures the future of life on our planet through the full and effective implementation of the Convention and its goals.

How can I participate in the Convention on Biological Diversity?

- Promote application of the Akwé:Kon Guidelines at the local and national level;
- Be involved in indigenous organizations (at local, national and international levels), which focus on biodiversity issues and through national indigenous and local community advisory committees.
- Communicate your views to the Secretariat, with regards to the current work programme - to be considered at the 5th meeting of WG8(j) in 15-19 October, in Montreal and feeding into the 9th meeting of the Parties to the Convention (COP 9) scheduled for May 2008 in Germany.
- Alternatively, contact the members of Advisory Group for Article 8(j) from your region, to discuss and have input through them (see list on page 15), including on the revision of the Composite Report on Status and Trends in traditional knowledge (obstacles to the retention of TK at national and local levels) and in general on the current work programme.
- Participate in the consultations on indicators for traditional knowledge, including through the International Indigenous Forum's (IIFB's) initiative on indicators (please see article on page 5).

- Express interest to be an indigenous consultant for research related to Article 8(j) and related provisions, by sending a recent CV and a letter to the Secretariat.

- Contact existing consultants directly to have input into their work.

- Sign up to receive automatic electronic CBD newsletters and notifications by creating a CBD account at <https://www.biodiv.org/user/signin.aspx?returnurl=%2fuser%2fsubscriptions.shtml>

The link to subscribe to the notifications is: <https://www.biodiv.org/user/subscriptions.shtml>

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It requires to Sign In with a CBD account. Anyone can create an account by clicking on: "Sign Up for a CBD Account"

- Apply for funding to participate in CBD meetings of relevance to you through the recently established Voluntary Fund for Indigenous and Local Communities (ILCs). □

For further information please visit the Article 8(j) web page at <http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/socio-eco/traditional/default.shtml>.



Maasai women within the community conservation area, Maasai Mara, Kenya.
Photo courtesy of Franz Dejon

Strengthening...

(continuation) From page 13



Traditional indigenous Kuna house.
Photo courtesy of Claudia Sobrevila

The results of this meeting are of relevance to the work of the CBD since the Convention recognizes the vital role that women play in the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and affirms the need for their full participation. A specific framework for the participation of indigenous women is found in the Program of Work of Article 8(j) and Related Provisions (Decision V/16) regarding participatory mechanisms for indigenous and local communities. It was therefore important to participate in this strategic meeting and assess its implications for the enhanced implementation phase of the Convention, particularly regarding the need expressed by the participants at the workshop on capacity building activities and greater participation in the CBD process. □



Participants to the workshop.
Photo courtesy of Claudia Sobrevila



Above photo: John Scott (center) in informal discussions with the members of the Article 8 (j) Advisory Group during the 4th Meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions, Granada, Spain. Photo courtesy of ENB/ IISD RS.

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MESSAGE OF THE
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CONVENTION
ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY,
TO THE INDIGENOUS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES OF THE WORLD

Most of you live in areas of mega-diversity and your species-diverse environments are deeply embedded in your productive and spiritual relationship with our Mother Earth. The international community will remain forever indebted to you, as the very origins of the international biodiversity agenda are found in the practices of your ancient cultures. Indeed of the estimated 6,000 cultures in the world, between 4,000 and 5,000 are indigenous. From your holistic perspective, nature is seen as a sacred whole and therefore human beings are united with the Earth, not separate from it. Because spirituality is the highest form of consciousness, you have contributed to raise the international community's global conscience on the need to put the biodiversity issues high on the agenda. As a result, Chapter 26 of Agenda 21, adopted at the Rio Summit in 1992, called for the strengthening of your role in promoting sustainable development including its biodiversity component.

The Convention on Biological Diversity is one of the major international movements to recognize your role in conserving and ensuring the sustainable use of biodiversity including through traditional knowledge. This recognition is enshrined in the preamble of the Convention as well as its Article 8(j). This unique legal instrument stresses the importance of customary practice in biodiversity conservation and calls for its protection and for equitable benefit sharing from the use and application of traditional technologies. To this end, at its first meeting held in Nassau in 1994, the Conference of the Parties decided to establish within the Secretariat our focal point on issues of concern to you. At its fourth meeting in 1998, it decided to establish your *Ad hoc* Open Ended Inter-Sessional Working Group on Article 8(j), Traditional knowledge, innovations and practices.

As the Convention has begun an exciting phase of enhanced implementation, you, as one of its major stakeholders, have a major role to play. The battle to protect life on Earth is also yours and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, that I have been honoured to head in the years to come, will always be on your side, as your faithful partner. I look forward to working with you and your representative organizations in the years to come to ensure the full implementation of the objectives of the Convention for the benefit of your communities, the environment and its people. To this end, I look forward to meeting the representatives of your organizations soon, at the fifth meeting the Working Group on Access and Benefit Sharing, and the fifth meeting Working Group on Article 8(j), which will be held in Montreal, Canada, from 8-12 and 15-19 October this year and then again at the Ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to be held in Bonn, Germany from 19-30 May, 2008.

Both of these meetings will consider broad ranging issues that are relevant to your role in the preservation of life on Earth. Your participation in these meetings and in the process of the Convention is central. We cannot complete our work without your involvement.

I look forward to meeting you, to receiving your input and building our partnership as we work to ensure the future of our planet through the full and effective implementation of the Convention and its goals.

Dr. Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary, CBD

Pachamama

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We would like to hear from you:

We are encouraging indigenous and local communities, governments, and relevant stakeholders to send articles and digital photos on their implementation, awareness, outreach and relevant activities regarding Article 8(j) and Related Provisions. Please send your contributions to the attention of John Scott at the following email: secretariat@biodiv.org

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* Pachamama means mother Earth (pacha: earth, mama: mother) in the Quecha / Aymara languages. The earth was a divinity venerated by the Incas and other inhabitants of the Andean plateau such as the Aymara and the Quecha peoples.



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