

'Rights of indigenous people and communities must be protected'

NON-GOVERNMENTAL organisations worldwide want the draft document on the Global Programme of Work on Protected Areas to strongly reflect the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples.

The document, over 300 pages long, is being finalised by delegates at the Seventh Conference of Parties (CO7) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) held here.

NGOs have collectively urged the assembly of 188 countries to ensure that local and indigenous communities are consulted before the creation of protected areas, which will affect their homes and livelihoods.

"There should be free and prior informed consent of indigenous and local communities for any projects and plans relating to their territories and resources in and around protected areas," a joint NGO statement said.

They are also against Governments turning over the management of protected areas to the private sector through concessions and leases, as this ends up depriving indigenous peoples of their rights and causes a greater loss of bio-diversity through ill-planned programmes.

The International Indigenous Forum on Bio-diversity said forcible resettlement of native and local people only increased their poverty and should be stopped. Forcible resettlement



HARRY: Oppose patents

destroyed their traditional way of life and limited their income-generating options.

"If State-parties are serious about poverty alleviation, forcible resettlement of indigenous peoples for conservation must be abandoned," they said.

They also want to be allowed to continue using their native customary laws, and for indigenous women to be allowed in decision-making as they were users and cultivators of the land.

Recognising native rights over land and bio-resources was paramount before moving on to other as-

pects of the Convention, such as technology transfer and equitable sharing, said Debra Harry of the Indigenous Peoples Council on Biocolonialism.

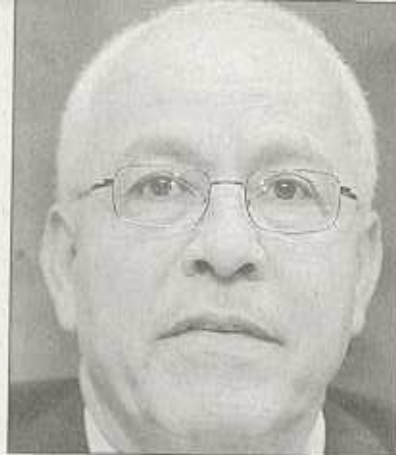
"We oppose patents on bio-resources and until indigenous rights are respected in the CBD, it is premature to even start discussions on access and benefit sharing," she said.

While Governments are keen to adopt the document, several are objecting to the setting of targets and timelines for implementation, preferring instead to let countries individually decide their own timeframes.

NGOs, however, want these to be decided at the global-level and adhered to.

Developing countries also want commitments from richer states to provide funding assistance and technology transfer to help poorer nations implement the protected areas programme. They stressed, however, that the technology must be suitable and agreed to by recipient nations and in accordance with their capacities.

Delegates are also hammering out another document on protecting mountain bio-diversity, as mountain and highland regions are the head sources of rivers, and how well they are protected has direct effects on lowland areas.



ZEDAN: Conductive atmosphere



LAW: Few younger scientists

Discussions on bio-diversity constructive

'Use funds to make firms appreciate environs'