



Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

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International Day for Biological Diversity



Biodiversity and Climate Change

**Statement by Dr. Ahmed Djoghlaif
Executive Secretary
Convention on Biological Diversity**

to the

**Fifth Meeting of the
Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on
Article 8(j) and related provisions**

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Distinguished delegates,

As you may know, before the United Nations there was the League of Nations. And before the League of Nations there was, on these very lands and waters, a six member League of Nations referred to as the Haudenosaunee or Iroquois Confederacy. We are gathered here on the traditional lands and waters of the Mohawk people who are members of that ancient Confederacy.

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy was a sophisticated political and social system. It united the territories of the six nations in a symbolic longhouse that stretched across the present-day state of New York and well into Quebec. The six nations were divided into two groups: the Elders, (consisting of the Mohawk, the Onondaga, and the Seneca); and the Younger, (the Oneidas, the Cayuga, and the Tuscarora). Despite this distinction, all decisions of the Confederacy had to be unanimous and by consensus.

This decision making process gave birth to the Great Law of Peace which prevailed for a thousand years.

The Confederacy and the Great Law of Peace, along with the Creation Story, the Two Row Wampum Treaty and the concept of the Seventh Generation, form the basis of local indigenous beliefs, values, traditions, philosophies and a unique world view.

The founding of the Confederacy demonstrates the value of working together in a respectful and peaceful manner; the Great Law provides a democratic model for governing; the Creation Story explains how we came to be on this Earth and what our duties are as human beings to each other and other life forms; the Two Row Wampum instructs us on how to interrelate with other governments and nations; and the concept of the Seventh Generation reminds us to be respectful of future generations.

The contemporary Mohawk community of Kahnawake has sustained itself and built upon this rich cultural background. I would like to convey my deep gratitude to Thanenrishon and his colleagues, who have just blessed the opening of our meeting today and sharing with us their rich cultural heritage and their wisdom.

I am both humbled and inspired by this story, which is a parable for the work we have before us. For our Parties and indigenous and local community participants also represent both Elder and Younger, who must come together, as a united family, to make decisions by consensus for the overall good of all, respecting the heritage of our ancestors and equally respectful of future generations, your children and my children... and indeed our children. Their future and life on Earth is under unprecedented threat.

Pressure from human activities on the natural functioning of the planet has reached such an extent that the ability of ecosystems to meet the needs of future generations is now seriously—perhaps irreversibly—jeopardized. Never since human beings first appeared on Earth, has anthropogenic change to our planet's natural functioning been so

destructive as it has been over the last half-century, resulting in an unparalleled extinction of biodiversity on Earth. The IUCN Endangered Species Red List recently released, has confirmed the findings of the Global Biodiversity Outlook as well as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. For some experts we are at the eve of a global mass species extinction, the sixth of its kind but the may be the first to be generated by one specie: we human being. This unprecedented challenge is being compounded by another human activity: climate change.

It is for this reason that the international community has celebrated on 22 May this year, the International Day on Biological Diversity under the theme “biodiversity and climate change”. I would like once again to extend to the Government of Norway our gratitude and ask Ms. Tone Solhaug to convey my deep appreciation, for its generous financial support which greatly contributed to the success of this event including the organization in collaboration with UNESCO of the exhibit on the human face of climate change, highlighting the negative impact of climate change on indigenous and local communities. The exhibit was displayed in UNESCO at its General Conference and will be displayed in Rome, at IFAD’s General Assembly. The exhibit will then be displayed at COP-9 in Bonn and then return to Montreal, to be displayed in the CBD Museum. Indeed climate change will affect all ecosystems, all species and all communities and the most vulnerable one will suffer the most. The indigenous and local communities and their rich heritage will suffer the most.

According to U.S. satellite data dating back 30 years, last month the Arctic summer ice shrank to its smallest on record, eclipsing the previous 2005 record by more than 20 percent. This will have far reaching implication on the traditional ways of life of indigenous and local communities. In Shishmaref, Alaska, a small Inuit village in the Chukchi Sea, seven houses have had to be relocated, three have fallen into the sea, and engineers predict that the entire village of 600 houses could disappear into the sea within the next few years. The cause: land subsidence due to permafrost thaws caused by increasing temperatures. Coastal losses to erosion of up to 100 feet per year have been observed in some locations in the Siberian, Alaskan and Canadian Arctic.

It is for this reason that, last week, the Nobel Peace foundation has for the second time in its history acknowledged the environmental dimension of the concept of peace and security by awarding its prestigious price to the former Vice President of the United States of America, Mr. Al Gore and to IPCC. I would like therefore to applaud the decision of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to devote its next meeting next year a couple of days, before the ninth meeting of the conference of the Parties in Bonn to the climate change issue. Your unique forum has certainly a contribution to make to this major event.

Indeed, the indigenous and local communities come to us with their traditional knowledge and urge humanity to remember what seem to have forgotten – that we are all interconnected and that what we do to one another and to Mother Earth, we in fact do it

to ourselves - and to rediscover our roots, to respect Mother Earth; or Pachamama, as the peoples of the Andes call her.

The indigenous and local communities are not simply the passive victims of climate change but valuable partners in the global efforts to address climate change. They, whose lives are intimately entwined with their natural environment, were the first to perceive the changes, beyond natural variability, in their surroundings. Indigenous and local communities are already using their traditional knowledge to address and adapt to climate change at the community level. They have a great deal to contribute in designing and implementing solutions to address biodiversity loss including that caused by climate change.

If we are to achieve the 2010 Biodiversity Target, to significantly reduce the loss of biodiversity, in light of the climate change crises, we must fully recognize and value indigenous and local communities as custodians of the Earth's biodiversity. The active involvement of indigenous and local communities around the world is essential in the achievement of this ambitious target. As diversity contains the potential for adaptation, there must be a global effort to work together, drawing on the unique knowledge of the peoples of the world, with a special appreciation for the knowledge of indigenous peoples.

It is for this reason that your Working Group on Article 8(j) has been encouraged by the 4,000 participants attending the Curitiba meeting, to provide input regarding the traditional knowledge related elements of an International Regime on Access and Benefit Sharing. I am extremely grateful to the two co-chairs of the working group on ABS, Mr. Fernando Casas and Mr. Timothy Hodges, to be with us this morning, to share with you and to inform you on the progress achieved at last week's meeting and the way ahead for finalizing the negotiation of the international regime as soon as possible and no later than 2010. You have also before you the report of the International Indigenous and Local Community consultation on ABS held at the headquarters of the Secretariat in Montreal on 19-21 September 2007. The convening of this expert group would not have been possible without the financial support of the Government of Spain. I would like also to thank the government of Spain for its financial support to the convening under the able leadership of Ms. Joji Carino, of the IIFB Working group on Indicators organized in collaboration with the Tebtebba Foundation. I would like also to pay tribute to the government of Spain for its generous financial support for the convening of these meetings as well as for financing the Spanish translation of the Secretariat website in Spanish launched today at the occasion of your meeting. Thanks to the French speaking family, the French version of the Secretariat website will be soon available.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Iroquois legend tells of the journey of the Peacemaker who journeyed to all six nations of the Haudenosaunee - asking each to live in peace with each other. At each stop, he brought good fortune, and the people believed him. When the representatives

from the six nations reached the first League meeting, they had brought weapons. The Peacemaker had them bury their weapons beneath the Great Tree of Peace and admonished all who lived beneath the tree to always look ahead for the sake of the League. He then gave each an arrow. He broke an arrow to show that standing apart from each other, they are easily broken. He then bundled the arrows and failed to break them, showing the strength they will have if they stand together. He then told them that in the future people will come who do not understand the Tree and will hack at its roots. When the tree begins to fall, they must hold the tree and keep it from hitting the ground. When they can hold it no longer, they must have their children hold the Tree, for it must never hit the ground.

We are those children and the tree is falling. It is our time to hold the tree for it must not hit the ground!

Therefore, your meeting today cannot be guided by the business as usual attitude. Shortly after midday on Thursday 13 September 2007, after more than two decades of negotiation, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. A few days later the Secretariat was honoured to host for the first time the annual meeting of the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues. Addressing the participants the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr. Sha Zhukang stated “There is no greater service that the United Nations could have done for its friends and partners in the indigenous communities and for State than to adopt the Declaration during the current Assembly session” I would like to echo this sentiment by stating “There is no greater service that fifth meeting of Working group on Article 8j, today attended by 325 participants, can render to its friends and partners in the indigenous communities and for the State than fulfilling the mandate assigned to it”

I thank you for your kind attention