



CBD

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

COMMUNIQUÉ

For use of media only
Not an official document.

22 May 2007
International Day for Biological Diversity



Biodiversity and Climate Change

CBD SECRETARIAT HOSTS MEETING OF THE INTER-AGENCY SUPPORT GROUP ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES (IASG) DAYS AFTER ADOPTION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES BY THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Montreal 18 September 2007 - Shortly after midday on Thursday, 13 September 2007, after more than two decades of preparation, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. A few days later, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is honoured to be hosting the annual meeting of the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues (IASG).

The IASG, comprising agencies of the United Nations system, is a mechanism for strengthening cooperation among them to promote the human rights and wellbeing of indigenous people and contribute to implementation of recommendations of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The Group also advises and assists in the mainstreaming of indigenous issues within the United Nations system.

The Group is meeting at the seat of the Convention Secretariat in Montreal from 17 to 19 September 2007 to look at how United Nations agencies and mechanisms can better and collectively support indigenous peoples to respond and adapt to the impacts of climate change, and how the international response can benefit from the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples.

Speaking at the opening of the meeting, Dr Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary of the CBD, paid tribute to the many leaders and representatives of indigenous peoples and Governments who have worked over decades to arrive at the historic Declaration adopted by the General Assembly last week.

Dr Djoghlaif said, "The Declaration, regarded by indigenous peoples as the most up-to-date articulation of their rights, explores the interface between cultural and biological diversity and provides a basis for developing standards concerning indigenous peoples within the international system. The Declaration includes issues relevant to indigenous peoples concerning cultural and biological diversity and other issues relevant to the Convention on Biological Diversity."

Article 29 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states that indigenous peoples have, "*the right to the conservation and protection of the environment.*" Article 31 states that:



Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.

Dr Djoghlafl noted that the CBD is unique among major international environmental instruments in its acknowledgement of the unique role indigenous and local communities play in conserving life on Earth. The preamble to the Convention recognizes that indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles have close and traditional dependence on biological resources. In Article 8(j), Parties to the Convention have committed themselves to respect, preserve, maintain and promote the wider use of traditional knowledge relevant for conservation and sustainable use, with the approval and involvement of indigenous and local communities.

The CBD is committed to the effective participation of indigenous peoples in the work and implementation of the Convention. The Convention's work programme for Article 8(j) and its related provisions is currently exploring issues directly relevant to the Declaration, including the retention and promotion of traditional knowledge, including *sui generis* forms of protection, elements of a draft code of conduct to ensure respect for the cultural and intellectual heritage of indigenous communities; issues of prior informed consent; and, most importantly, the development of an international regime for access to genetic resources and benefit sharing.

In a video link-up at the opening of the IASG meeting, Mr. Johan Scholvinck of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs delivered a message from the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr. Sha Zhukang.

In his message, Mr. Sha Zhukang said, "There is no greater service that the United Nations could have done for its friends and partners in the indigenous communities and for States than to adopt the Declaration during the current Assembly session. The Declaration is, fundamentally, about respect for the human rights of indigenous peoples and about building States on the basis of justice. Let us make this respect and this sense of justice manifest in the work of our agencies."

Speaking on the theme of the IASG meeting, Mr Sha Zhukang added, "With their wealth of knowledge about their environment, indigenous peoples can and should play a role in the efforts to respond to climate change as a global challenge of sustainable development. As the United

Nations system, we should listen to them and facilitate and support this role”

In her opening comments, Ms. Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, the Chairperson of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues said, “I cannot start this introduction today but by sharing with you the joy of the landmark decision of the General Assembly on the 13th of September last week, when the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples after more than two decades of efforts. General Assembly resolution 61/295 is indeed of historic significance: it marked a moment that indigenous peoples and States decided to reconcile with painful histories of the past and go forward on a path of human rights.”

Ms. Elissavett Stamatopoulou, the Chief of the Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, also speaking at the opening of the IASG meeting said, “For us, as UN agencies, the Declaration is an extraordinary document that we have to turn into a living document through our work. This is a big responsibility and an uplifting opportunity. The increasing profile of indigenous issues at the UN means for the whole UN system that indeed they must put in place not just more attention but also more human and financial resources behind this area of work.”

The role of indigenous peoples, both as custodians of biodiversity and proponents of cultural diversity, is paramount in understanding the connection of these issues. For more than 370 million indigenous peoples, the Earth offers not only life, but is the basis of their cultural and spiritual identities. Because their world view holds that the Earth and its resources are inherited from the ancestors and includes trans-generational obligations, for indigenous peoples, the Earth and its resources are a sacred heritage.

In closing Dr Djoghlaif noted that, “If we are to achieve the 2010 biodiversity target to significantly reduce the loss of biodiversity, in light of the climate-change crisis, we must fully recognize and value indigenous peoples 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”.