

Indigenous Peoples (1)

The Fourth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

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The fourth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII) was held May 16-27, 2005 at the United Nations headquarters in New York. The PFII focused primarily on the Millennium Development Goals, the special theme of the year, and there emerged active debates and arguments on the way to protect and promote the indigenous rights by using UN systems in changing the international scene, especially in relation to the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous people, which started in January 2005.

Special Theme: Millennium Development Goals 1 and 2

Since the second session, the PFII has specified one agenda as the special theme of the year. The session's theme this year was "Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Indigenous Peoples" and the PFII focused on two of the eight goals: Goal 1 "Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger" and Goal 2 "Achieve universal primary education." Four out of the ten days of the session concentrated on this special theme.



Mr. Abe Yupo with indigenous representatives from India

When I reached NY on July 20th, the agenda item 4 on MDGs was almost coming to an end. My impression of the last part of the discussion was that the majority of the interventions were made from indigenous organisations as well as NGOs from developing countries in Africa, Latin America and South and Southeast Asia. It was my concern that to raise the issues of indigenous peoples in Japan, the Ainu and the Okinawans, in relation to MDGs, would be extremely difficult since the issues they face are of different character. Although the Ainu and the Okinawans face poverty and lack higher education compared to mainstream Japanese, extreme poverty and the achievement of primary education are not the issues they have to deal with. I was afraid that a divide between the indigenous organisations from different regions would come to surface during the session.

However, it was not only indigenous peoples from the developed countries, but also those from developing countries, that were critical of the present agenda-setting and methodology of the MDGs. UNDP, the organisation in charge of promoting the MDGs, set numerical targets and quantifiable indicators to assess progress, which included 18 targets and over 40 indicators as well as the eight main goals. The main goals included poverty, education, gender, child and maternal mortality, illness, environmental sustainability and a global partnership for development. It was the critics from the indigenous organisations and NGOs that argued, by treating these issues independently and by concentrating only



Ms. Kimura with Mr. Abe Yupo from Ainu, center, and Mr. Parshuram from Nepal

on the numerical targets, that it would be difficult to shed light on the structural inequality and discrimination which causes the majority of the problems to indigenous peoples. Taking this point into consideration, the PFII adopted the following recommendations: "the Forum is concerned that, unless the particular situation of indigenous peoples are adequately taken into account, some Millennium Development Goals processes may lead to accelerated loss of lands and natural resources for indigenous peoples, and thus of their means of subsistence and their displacement, as well as to accelerated assimilation and erosion of their culture." It was suggested to UN agencies and member states that the mainstreaming of the indigenous issues in the Millennium Development Goals were vital to the achievement of the MDGs.

Other Agendas: Human Rights, Data Collection and Follow-up to the Previous Special Themes

The PFII focuses on other agendas such as human rights, data collection and disaggregation, and follow-ups to the previous special themes (Women and Children). Shimin Gaikou Centre, together with the Ainu Association of Hokkaido, made an intervention on the situation of the Ainu under agenda item (4a) Human Rights. In relation to this year's special theme, MDGs, we attracted attention to the current situation of the

Ainu. Although the Ainu do not face the kind of poverty that the Millennium Development Goals are seeking to address, many of them occupy the lowest stratum in the prosperous Japanese society. The roots of their suffering lie in the history of exploitation that the Ainu have experienced, in which their lands and properties were taken away and the collective rights to land and resources have not been recognized by the government. We stressed that the indigenous issues would not be solved solely by achieving numerical targets. Rather, we emphasised the need for the inclusive protection and promotion of the indigenous rights, and a national level monitoring system.

The Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

Apart from the scheduled agenda, there emerged a wide discussion and various interventions on the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People which was launched in January this year. Though the start of the second decade was welcomed, concern was raised that the launch was largely unnoticed.

The Indigenous Caucus made an intervention and evaluated the outcome of the first decade. It was noted that the first decade was successful in that the UN and the international community became

aware of Indigenous Peoples. Several important achievements were developed, including the establishment of the PFII and the creation of a Special Rapporteur on human rights and freedoms of Indigenous Peoples. However, the Caucus statement pointed out that it failed to adopt the Draft Declaration of the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples, and also could not attract the active involvement of member states. Especially, the latter point was stressed in comparison with the progress in the establishment of international standards and frameworks.

The General Assembly has called for a Programme of Action for the second decade to be presented at its next session (end-2005). The Caucus noted that the active involvement and monitoring of the state governments is the primary concern of the IPs. It went: "The Second Decade should focus upon the activities of States and ensure improvement for the situations of Indigenous communities. ... What is lacking, and continues to be a point of frustration for Indigenous Peoples, is proactive, accountable and participatory States' activities."

It was also regretted that there had been no official launch to the second decade so far, and a demand was made for a major publicity campaign after the General Assembly approves the Programme of Action. On this point, the chairperson of the PF, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, stated in her closing speech that the launching of the



A representative from Nepal speaking at the forum

program for the second decade is expected during the 5th session of the Forum.

The Main Theme of the 5th Session: Other MDGs and Re-Defining of the Goals

At the end of the session, the special theme of the next session, "The Millennium Development Goals and Indigenous Peoples: redefining the Goals," was adopted. It was mentioned that the Goals 3 to 8 (3. gender equality, 4. reduce child mortality, 5. improve maternal health, 6. combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, 7. ensure environmental sustainability, 8. develop a global partnership for development) will be addressed through indigenous approaches to cultural diversity, traditional knowledge and human rights. Taking into consideration the criticism towards the MDGs, the Forum decided to include all the remaining goals in the next session, instead of dealing with each goal separately as was the case of this year, and try to re-define the goals from the indigenous perspectives.

Looking at the indigenous peoples' organisations and the NGO activities at the PFII this year, one can notice that the indigenous peoples took two different strategies towards the MDGs at the same time. One was to question the very basis of the goals and premises of the MDGs and to discuss the impact of the development



At a meeting of the Asian Caucus

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