Indigenous Peoples call on parties to recognize rights, effective participation in REDD

Bonn, 14 August, Germany (Raymond de Chavez) – Indigenous peoples have called on parties in the ongoing Climate Talks to recognize indigenous peoples’ rights and their effective participation in the REDD processes. In the current negotiating text on REDD, Paragraph 109 contains proposed text on indigenous peoples. These include the respect of their full, prior and informed consent in accordance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and the full and effective engagement of indigenous peoples and local communities in the design and implementation of REDD-related activities, among others.

In a meeting yesterday, Mr. Tony LaVina, a member of the Philippine delegation and Facilitator of the Informal Discussion Group on REDD, updated indigenous participants on the status of negotiations on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD). This is a key proposal under mitigation being currently negotiated in the Bonn Climate Talks.

Around 20 indigenous representatives from Latin America, Asia, the Pacific and Africa are in Bonn for the negotiations to ensure that indigenous peoples’ issues and concerns are reflected in the climate talks. Earlier, they held a strategy session to draft a policy paper, identify further text proposals and support existing ones.

In the meeting, Mr. LaVina said that the contact group is consolidating the negotiating text, specifically on REDD, to make this simpler in time for the continuing climate talks to be held in Bangkok, Thailand this September. This process included consolidating some paragraphs and and identifying common elements.

The 199-page negotiating text presented by the the Ad-Hoc Working Group on Long-Term Cooperative action (AWGLCA) had earlier had been criticized by parties as being unwieldy, repetitive and difficult to understand. Efforts are now underway to consolidate the text under different informal groups.

Mr. LaVina also clarified the non-inclusion of paragraph 109 in the earlier draft text which
was presented in the previous meetings of the contact group. He said that this was inadvertently not included due to the rearrangements of the paragraphs. However, he said that there was no intention to drop this.

Indigenous participants earlier expressed concern on why this paragraph was not included in the revised negotiating text on REDD. As clarified by LaVina, this has now been included in the draft consolidated text.

He further said that the current process under REDD was that “REDD is not only about carbon but is also about people. This is the statement that the process wants to say.”

Regarding the support of state-parties on the concerns of indigenous peoples, Mr. LaVina said that there is more support from parties in addressing these concerns within the negotiations. He further said that there are “a lot of delegations sympathetic to indigenous peoples and there is a lot of openness - which is a surprise for me.”

However, he clarified that there is still a lot of work to be done. Several state-parties have expressed concern on the inclusion of the UNDRIP or of any mention of rights at all. But at the same time, he said that he could not predict how the negotiations would go.

In closing, Mr. LaVina said that, as facilitator, he can make a commitment to the indigenous caucus. This, he said, is his commitment to ensure “access with the right information so that you can make the right decisions.”

REDD remains a contentious issue for indigenous peoples. This proposal aims to mitigate climate change by ensuring that carbon stocks stored in the forests are not released through deforestation or degradation of forests. While the methodologies and mechanisms are still being discussed in the current negotiations, pilot projects are, however, already being implemented in several countries. These REDD pilot projects are often implemented in territories of indigenous peoples.

Rights, control over forests and resources, and recognition of the role of indigenous peoples in forest conservation and management are therefore core concerns of indigenous peoples. In the Anchorage Declaration of Indigenous Peoples adopted in April this year, indigenous peoples stated that “All initiatives under Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) must secure the recognition and implementation of the rights of Indigenous Peoples, including security of land tenure, recognition of land title according to traditional ways, uses and customary laws and the multiple benefits of forests for climate, ecosystems, and peoples before taking any action.”

The ongoing negotiations are therefore crucial for indigenous peoples as they work towards ensuring that their rights are recognized and protected, not only in REDD, but also in the agreements that will come out of the 15th Conference of Parties Meeting in December.

The current Bonn Informal Climate Talks which commenced last August 10 is part of the continuing process identified in the Bali Action Plan in 2007. This roadmap will lead towards the development of a climate agreement beyond 2012 in Copenhagen in December.