VICTORIA TAULI-CORPUZ
CHAIRPERSON

ADDRESS TO THE OPENING OF FIFTH SESSION OF THE PERMANENT
FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

New York, 15 May 2006

Vice - President of the General Assembly,
President of the Economic and Social Council,
Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,
Distinguished observers from Member States, Indigenous Peoples’
Organizations, the Inter-Governmental system, non-governmental organizations,
the academia and the media, indigenous sisters and brothers,

It gives me a great pleasure to welcome you and address you today at this fifth
session of the Permanent Forum which has devoted its special theme to the
“Millennium Development Goals and indigenous peoples: Redefining the Millennium
Development Goals”, addressing Goals 3 to 8.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my co-members of the Permanent
Forum and the Secretariat for all their contributions in fulfilling the Forum’s
mandate and for the implementation of some of the recommendations from the
Forum. The Forum members have engaged with various processes at the
national, regional and international level to raise awareness on issues important
for indigenous peoples. We also tried very hard to promote, as part of good governance and a human rights-based approach to development, indigenous peoples’ participation. Their effective participation in designing and implementing policy and programmatic frameworks as well as projects remains as a key challenge.

I would also like to thank the representatives of indigenous peoples’ organizations and nations, the members of the Inter-agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues and the governments who, likewise, have done their share in helping implement the Forum recommendations. I pay tribute to the indigenous peoples of the world who relentlessly pursue their struggles for their rights and dignity and their own development visions and priorities. We should never fail to remind ourselves, that they are the very reason for the existence of the Permanent Forum.

Our opening session for this fifth Session of the Permanent Forum is very special as it is held in this historic hall of the UN General Assembly where many significant decisions for the world have been made. I am sure that for most of you it is the first time you entered this hall.

At the Fifty-Ninth Session of the General Assembly it adopted Resolution 59/174 in 20 December 2004, which proclaimed the Second International Decade of the World’s Indigenous Peoples from 2005 to 2015. Subsequently, the Programme of Action of the Second Decade was adopted at the Sixtieth Session in resolution 60/506 in 29 November 2005. This adopted the theme “Partnership for Action and Dignity”. Of course, these resolutions are direct results of the lobbying work of
indigenous peoples and the recommendations from the Permanent Forum and the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations.

These two resolutions reaffirmed “..that States should, in accordance with international law, take concerted positive steps to ensure respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples, on the basis of equality and non-discrimination, and recognizing the value and diversity of their distinctive identities, cultures and social organization.” These defined the goal of the Decade which is the further strengthening of international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous peoples through action-oriented programmes and projects, increased technical assistance and standard-setting activities.

One significant point to note in the second resolution (60/142), is that it used the phrase “Indigenous Peoples” without any qualifications. It became a subject of debate during its adoption but it was passed, nevertheless. This move, finally, puts to rest the debate on whether “indigenous people” or “indigenous peoples” should be used. Since we started engaging with the United Nations, we insisted that we are “indigenous peoples” and we are subjects of international law and this resolution affirmed this.

We are here today in the General Assembly Hall because we will officially launch the Second International Decade of the World’s Indigenous Peoples and its Programme of Action. We, therefore, should take this opportunity to pledge that we will dedicate our best efforts to achieve the goal and objectives of the Second Decade and implement its programme of action.
It has been an interesting year since the last session of the Permanent Forum. The negotiations on the Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples finally wrapped up in February 2006, after eleven years of work. The creation of a set of legal standards and rules at the international level which will ensure respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples. In some countries, the declaration will be especially important, particularly where the rights of indigenous peoples have been barely acknowledged in the past, while in others the declaration will help strengthen national laws and institutions.

It is my hope that the adoption of the Draft will be part of the agenda of the First Session of newly established Human Rights Council. And it is my hope that this Draft will be adopted by the General Assembly before this year ends. Its adoption will be a milestone in the long journey of indigenous peoples searching for social justice, respect of their collective and individual human rights, and the implementation of a human-rights based approach for their self-determined development. Its adoption will provide the fundamental framework for the work of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Over the past year, a record number of seven “satellite meetings” hosted by or for the Forum are feeding into the Forum’s session. All these meetings came up with reports which are part of the official documentation of the fifth session. These meetings and expert-workshops are the following;

- The annual session of the Inter-Agency Support group on Indigenous Issues, which focused on how to bring indigenous peoples’ related policies and recommendations of the Forum closer to the regional and national level;
• The “International Expert Workshop on Indigenous Traditional Knowledge” which was held in Panama and was hosted by UNICEF-LAC.

• The “International Expert Workshop on Indigenous Peoples, MDGs, Participation and Good Governance”.

• The “International Workshop on Visions of Partnerships with Indigenous Peoples” which was held in Nuuk, Greenland and hosted by the Greenland Homerule Government and the Government of Denmark.

• The “Expert Group meeting on Indigenous Peoples and Indicators of Well-being” which was held in Ottawa and hosted by the Canadian Government. This is the first in a series of four regional meetings planned on this issue; and

• The “International Workshop on Indigenous Peoples and Migration” organized by IOM in cooperation with our secretariat.

• The “Conference on Indigenous Peoples and Poverty” which was hosted by the World Bank and co-organized with the Permanent Forum, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development. This was just held a few days ago.

These processes are crucial for a more in-depth discussion of the issues raised during the Forum. The reports provide some answers on how to achieve self-determined development or ‘development with identity’ for indigenous peoples. I will deal more on the issues addressed in this workshop in relation to the theme of this fifth session when I present the second part of this address in this afternoon’s session.
In closing I would like to remind us of the objectives of the Second International Decade of the World’s Indigenous Peoples.

As described in the Programme of Action, the main objectives of the Decade are:

1a) Promote non-discrimination and inclusion of indigenous peoples in the design, implementation and evaluation of international, regional and national processes regarding laws, policies, resources, programmes and projects;

b) Promote full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in decisions which directly or indirectly affect their lifestyles, traditional lands and territories, their cultural integrity as indigenous peoples with collective rights or any other aspect of their lives, considering the principle of free, prior and informed consent;

c) Redefine development policies that depart from a vision of equity and that are culturally appropriate, including respect for the cultural and linguistic diversity of indigenous peoples;

2d) Adopt targeted policies, programs, projects and budgets for the development of indigenous peoples, including concrete benchmarks, and particular emphasis on indigenous women, children and youth;

3e) Develop strong monitoring mechanisms and enhancing accountability at the international, regional and particularly the national level, regarding the implementation of legal, policy and operational frameworks for the protection of indigenous peoples and the improvement of their lives.

Let us pledge in this Hall of the United Nations General Assembly our commitment to achieve these objectives so that in the year 2015 we will come back and be proud of what we have achieved in terms of ending discrimination,
marginalization, oppression and extreme poverty of indigenous peoples because we took seriously the challenge to create partnerships for action and dignity.

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