

## *Information on the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples Issues and the upcoming UNFPA hosted Inter-agency support group meeting on Indigenous peoples Issues*

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is an advisory body to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations established by ECOSOC Resolution 2000/22, with a mandate to discuss indigenous issues related to economic and social development and human rights.

Each year the Permanent Forum convenes governments, UN agencies and Indigenous Peoples from around the world to hold sessions aimed at discussing their main challenges, making specific recommendations to address them. Till the present, since May 2002, there have been ten Sessions and UNFPA has been a part of all of them.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted, after over twenty years of negotiations, on September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2007, establishes international human rights standards for indigenous peoples and has become the main guiding framework for the work of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and a powerful mechanism of negotiation for advancing the human rights and well-being of indigenous peoples. It is also the guiding framework of the United Nations Interagency Support Group on Indigenous Issues formed by the UNS organizations that seeks to promote inter-agency cooperation and coherence on indigenous peoples issues considering their own mandates as well, and contributing to the implementation of the recommendations of the Permanent Forum at country, regional and global level, including the mainstreaming of indigenous peoples issues within the UNS.

The Inter-agency Support Group meets at least once a year for a substantive meeting, with follow-up meetings and communications, as necessary. Each UN agency has the responsibility of hosting the IASG annual meeting, on a rotational basis. This year UNFPA was chosen by sister agencies to chair the IASG and it will thus host the 2011 Annual Meeting from 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> November, in headquarters'.

### Indigenous Peoples and UNFPA

According to the UN State of Indigenous Peoples, there are over 370 million indigenous people in some 90 countries, living in all regions of the world. The situation of indigenous peoples in many parts of the world is critical today. Poverty rates are significantly higher among indigenous peoples compared to other groups. While they constitute 5 per cent of the world's population they are 15 per cent of the world's poorest and excluded sectors.

According to the same report, Indigenous Peoples suffer from poorer health, are more likely to experience disability and reduced quality of life. Life expectancy gaps are higher among indigenous peoples with differentials of 13 years in Guatemala, 20 years in Nepal and 11 years in New Zealand. Infant and maternal mortality rates, malnutrition and tuberculosis are also prevalent among indigenous peoples and early adolescent marriages and pregnancies are a common phenomenon among indigenous girls. Likewise, according to WHO the incidence of other public health issues

such as drug abuse, alcoholism, depression and suicide have increased among them. “In Latin America, where disaggregated data is readily available, indigenous infant mortality rates are always higher than those of the total population, ranging from 1.11 times higher in Chile to 3.09 times higher than the general population in Panama” and, “In Viet Nam, access to maternal health care services range from 90 per cent in urban areas to as low as 20 per cent in remote areas of the Central Highland and Northern Uplands regions inhabited by indigenous peoples”.

### The Niche of UNFPA on Indigenous Peoples

According to the information available at HQ, UNFPA is working on indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities in the following twenty countries: Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Vietnam, Philippines, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Nepal, Uganda, Central African Republic, Congo and Kenya.

Its work is totally in sync with the new focus of the UNFPA Strategic Plan’s MTR, since it has been contributing towards addressing indigenous women’s rights and particularly their reproductive rights, in line with the recommendations of the Permanent Forum and the ICPD. Its work has focused on supporting increased access of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities to enhance quality, culturally pertinent, reproductive health services, with emphasis on the development of policies, norms and improved services aimed at addressing maternal mortality among indigenous women. On a smaller scale, UNFPA has also worked on supporting the prevention of HIV among indigenous peoples, especially indigenous youth and has contributed to advance gender equality and empowerment among indigenous women and their organizations, but also targeting adolescents and youth. Through research studies and data collection, dissemination and usage promotion, in partnership with other organizations such as ECLAC, UNFPA has contributed to increasing the knowledge base on the situation of indigenous peoples, particularly women and ethnic minorities in Latin America.

The meeting to be hosted by UNFPA is an opportunity to demonstrate in an Interagency mechanism and also with Indigenous Experts of the Permanent Forum the advantageous position and contribution UNFPA has been making to advance reproductive rights and reduce maternal mortality in countries with large differentials thus contributing towards the acceleration of MDG 5.