

**2011 Annual Meeting of the UN Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues**

21-23 November 2011  
UNFPA Headquarters, 605 Third Avenue, New York

Opening Statement by the Chairperson of the United Nations Permanent Forum on  
Indigenous Issues  
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Mr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director UNFPA,  
Representatives of UN Agencies,  
Friends and Colleagues

Good Morning

It gives me a great pleasure to address you today at the 2011 meeting of the Inter-Agency Support Group. On behalf of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, I would like to thank our host, the United Nations Population Fund for convening this year's annual meeting. A big thank you to UNFPA staff, especially Sonia and the team, who worked so hard to have all of us here, in New York. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our outgoing hosts, WHO for its excellent work in 2010 and 2011.

Many important events have taken place this year on the international agenda on indigenous peoples' issues, both within your agencies, within the UNPFII and also in a larger perspective. First of all it is fundamental to celebrate the achievement of a universal consensus that has now been established around the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, with the Governments of Canada and the United States lending their support to the Declaration. We, the UNPFII and the UN System now have a stronger position to promote the full realization of the UNDRIP, moving beyond the rhetoric to actual implementation.

2011 marked the tenth anniversary of the inauguration of the UNPFII with 14 new members taking our seat as of 1 January 2011. From the outset, the Permanent Forum has worked in close alliance with you, the agencies and members of the IASG, to further strengthen the UN Systems' response to the agendas of indigenous peoples worldwide. Through the years, you have been vital partners in addressing the concerns and issues of indigenous peoples at the international, national and local levels. We count on you to make a real difference in their lives - through your policies, your programmes, your country and regional offices, and above all, your partnerships with indigenous peoples.

We have many issues on the agenda for this meeting. However, the central issue is how to further strengthen the partnership and mutual support we offer each other. Much has been achieved, but there are many challenges ahead. It is therefore of utmost important to take a moment to reflect on how we can improve and build on our mutual support and efforts on promoting indigenous peoples' rights.

Some of the gains have been in the area of outreach to UN Country Teams, with the collaboration of IASG members, in raising awareness of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the UNDG Guidelines.

We have expanded and consolidated our efforts and as we meet here in New York, a team composed of the Secretariat of the UNPFII, OHCHR and ILO together with local consultants, is in Congo Brazzaville conducting trainings for government officials, indigenous peoples' representative and the UN Country Team there. My colleague, Mr. Simon Mvibodoulou is also participating at the training. A similar training was held in Argentina in mid-October this year, and we will have one in the Philippines in early December. I would like to express my appreciation to IFAD for their support in facilitating these trainings and we hope that this will continue as there is increasing demand and recognition of the value of such initiatives. We count on all of you to ensure this continues.

I wish to thank the members of the IASG for their ongoing engagement in the sessions of the UN Permanent Forum including UNICEF's participation in the in-depth dialogue with the UN Permanent Forum during the 10th session and the meeting in Mexico to follow up on the UNPF recommendations. I also wish to thank the IASG for its 2010 annual report to the session of the Permanent Forum focusing on indigenous people's health. This is an issue that deserves greater attention and efforts. I thank the WHO for inviting me to participate in the meeting on health social determinants in Brazil. I am pleased that we build on this by having this IASG meeting focus on 'population, reproductive health and gender equality as key dimensions for advancing human rights and well being of indigenous peoples and their development with culture and identity'.

On behalf of the UN Permanent Forum, I would also like to recognize those agencies that have adopted policies on engaging with indigenous peoples already and also those that are in the process of doing so. FAO took a major step forward in its work with indigenous peoples when it adopted its policy on indigenous and tribal peoples and also UN-HABITAT, which in 2011 developed a Policy Guide to Secure Land and Property Rights for Indigenous Peoples in Cities. I was recently at a meeting of UNESCO and together with the Special Rapporteur and the Chair of the Expert Mechanism participated in the launching event to raise awareness and build support for a Indigenous Peoples' policy by UNESCO staff and government delegations.

I would also like to recognize UNICEF and UNFPA, which currently are in the process of adopting corporate strategies on indigenous issues. We are encouraged by these initiatives and we are available for any support or assistance that may be needed - to UNFPA and UNICEF and to other UN agencies. It is our aspiration that many more agencies and international institutions will follow and establish institutional policies and guidelines so as to strengthen their engagement on indigenous peoples' issues. The added value of a specific policy document on indigenous peoples as an operational tool for UN agencies is undeniable, and this is particularly relevant now that we have universal agreement on the UN Declaration.

At the institutional level I would like to mention other important initiatives, which clearly indicates how we are gaining important ground in many of your agencies with respect to placing indigenous peoples at the program level. In that respect I would like to acknowledge the United Nations Indigenous Peoples' Partnership initiated by ILO, OHCHR and UNDP, an innovative framework for joint action on indigenous people issues. Other agencies have joined the partnership and we are looking forward to a fruitful partnership through UNPFII's participation in UNIPP's Policy Board. This kind of initiatives are in my view the ones that have the greatest potential in terms of having an impact as they are more focused and build upon strategic partnerships among groups of Agencies. They should be inclusive to all, yes, but not to lose focus and effectiveness.

Another important activity coordinated between different agencies- CEPAL/CELADE, UNFPA, FONDO INDIGENA, Secretaria de Cumbre Iberoamericana and AECID and UNPFII Secretariat on Census and Indigenous peoples participation proves the need to continue addressing issues together.

We applaud IFAD's initiative to establish an indigenous peoples' forum as part of the implementation of its policy on indigenous peoples. It will convene for the first time in 2013 alongside the meeting of IFAD's Governing Council. We have continued working along with IFAD in the decentralization of the IP's small grant facility. I am also very pleased with the formal invitation we have received from WIPO for the UNPFII to take part in the future session of its intergovernmental committee. The institutionalization of the open-ended dialogue with the WB is another important advance that I like to highlight.

Other important efforts of the year is of course the adoption of the Nagoya Protocol to the Convention, on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from Their Utilization, and the adoption of a code of conduct on respect for the cultural and intellectual heritage of indigenous and local communities relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity known as "Tkarihwaie: ri Code of Ethical Conduct", also under the auspices of CBD.

I also want to remind you all that the upcoming Expert Group Meeting (EGM) to be held from 18-20 January 2012 will focus on violence against indigenous women and girls. Many indigenous women and girls live in precarious conditions of poverty and violence and many indigenous organizations around the world have long spoken out against an epidemic of violence against indigenous women and children which is one of the most pervasive human rights abuses of all time. It is important to include the youth and address the issues of violence against the indigenous girl child in order to safeguard the future generations. One of our most solemn responsibilities is to secure the full enjoyment and entitlement of indigenous girls to a life free from any form of violence in any character or form, as a basic human right.

We appreciate the active interest and engagement several of your agencies notably our hosts UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women and others have demonstrated toward this issue and look forward to your input in making sure this EGM is productive and responsive to the current issues and trends facing indigenous women and girls.

The EGM will also inform the May session of the UN Permanent Forum which has as its central issue: *The Doctrine of Discovery: its enduring impact on indigenous peoples and the right to redress for past conquests (articles 28 and 37 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples)*. We count on your active participation, including at the highest level, in making the next session a success. Some of the challenges ahead are the following:

The IASG has been and can continue playing catalytic activities of global scope. In order to build a stronger partnership between the UNPFII members and UN Agencies, the UNPFII have appointed focal points among its membership. We still have to work closer to turn better advocate for and support states (particularly governments) and indigenous peoples at the country level to advance indigenous peoples' rights. I met recently with Nicaragua and Bolivia UN country teams. We need to focus more on UN Agencies and UN Resident Coordinators that can play a critical role at the country level, where it

matters most to indigenous peoples. We have to improve the relation between UNPFII members and Agencies. For example Antonella, IFAD and I had a very good experience visiting Kenya in September, and with UNICEF in Latin America we have been able to coordinate with other members of the UNPFII. I hope these focal points can keep track on reports and table of recommendations/action plan from each Agency, provide feedback and strategic questions, and meet with heads of Agencies at least once a year during the Forum session in New York. Ideally these members could also allocate time to meet with technical staff at each Agency and make an assessment on the level of implementation of the Recommendations. Ideally this member can also serve as liaison persons between indigenous peoples' organizations in various regions and the UN Agency in case there are concerns, complaints etc. about the work of that Agency, particularly at the country level. We need to find ways for a continuous feedback system from indigenous peoples' organizations throughout the year.

In terms of reporting, it would be really important to revise the questionnaire that is sent to Agencies every year and frame it more with recommendations to each Agency, and consider the possibility of sharing different type of reports, to report on the work and how you have addressed the Forum recommendations.

One of the main focus of the UNPFII is on implementation of the recommendations, and I believe regional and country IASGs can play an important and effective role. It has proven instrumental to educate and advance indigenous peoples' issues within UN at the country level and this is inextricably linked to the establishment of consultative/participatory mechanisms composed of indigenous peoples representatives at the country level. This year I attended the Latin American IASG that is giving important steps and is now focus on strengthening country groups. I met last week with the IASG in Bolivia and recently in Nicaragua. Support to the establishment of a regional IASG in Africa and Asia should be strong focus of IASG in the next 2 years. I will be meeting this week with the UN country team in Paraguay, and in each case I can see the need to build a knowledge network/system that links your colleagues not only at the global level but also at the country level. I believe we can agree that there is a need of

a platform that serves as repository of documents and information about UN Agencies/IASG in the area of indigenous peoples. Additionally there is more need to continue supporting the implementation of the Action Plan/training on UNDG Guidelines to UN officials at country level. The Secretariat of the UNPFII has been playing a key role in ensuring this information.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you here today for taking the time to come to New York to participate in the IASG annual meeting. I hope that together we can all discuss in detail the measures that we need to take to advance the rights of indigenous peoples around the world, particularly in relation to health, and to advance the work of the IASG.

--Thank You--