

First Preparatory Committee Meeting of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development
UN Headquarters, New York, 17-19 May 2010

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' OPENING STATEMENT

17 May 2010

Thank you Mr. Co-Chairs for allowing major groups to present brief opening statements. I speak on behalf of the Indigenous Peoples' Major Group. Let me congratulate you Ambassador Park and Ambassador Ashe for being elected as co-chairs of this First Preparatory meeting of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development and Mr. Sha Zukang for being elected as the Secretary-General of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development.

Indigenous peoples have been very active in the processes leading to the Rio Summit, during the Summit itself, in Johannesburg in 2002 and in all the meetings of the Commission on Sustainable Development up to the one which ended last week. In Johannesburg we came up with our Kimberley Sustainable Development Plan and our own Indigenous Peoples' Declaration in Johannesburg. We fought very hard to ensure that “the vital role of indigenous peoples in sustainable development” was reaffirmed in the Johannesburg Declaration agreed upon by all the Heads of States present in that historic event.

Unfortunately, we have to say that the international community as well as the States and non-state actors, including us, have not succeeded in any significant measure to meet the goals of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Declaration and Plan of Action. Milestones, benchmarks and indicators have been set but most of these have not been reached. The fact that the world faces the worst global ecological and economic crises and the worst economic and social inequities in these times is enough evidence to show that we did not meet the targets of economic, environmental and social sustainability. Most indigenous peoples believe that the reason for this failure is simple. The unsustainable economic growth model based on the infinite extraction and consumption of finite natural resources and the unregulated behaviour of the financial markets prevailed in the past 20 years. These are the big implementation gaps of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. These crises continue to have devastating impacts on indigenous peoples, as seen in the continuing gross violations of our human rights, massive degradation of our ecosystems and erosion of biological diversity and cultural diversity, and the increasing poverty in our communities.

This is the reason why we worked hard to get the United Nations to adopt the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 and to establish several bodies and mechanisms like the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. We support fully the G-77 and China statement that the approach to sustainable development must be holistic. We would like to add that the foundations of this holistic approach are the ecosystems approach and the human-rights based approach to development. It is within this context that we strongly urge the States to ensure that the important link of sustainable development with international human rights law and instruments, including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples, should be affirmed in UN Conference on Sustainable Development. We commit to contribute to an honest evaluation of the little progress and the many failures in achieving sustainable development and identify lessons which should be learned. Finally we insist that we should be effectively involved in developing the architecture of the green economy and a new sustainable development paradigm. Thank you Co-Chairs.