

UNDP and the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

UNDP RIPP at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (20 April - 2 May 2008)

On 22nd April 2008, during the 7th session of the Permanent Forum, UNDP RIPP organized an inter-active **Global Dialogue: Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples' Bio-Cultural Diversity**. Indigenous representatives and Governments, UN Permanent Forum members, UN Agencies and others exchanged ideas and views on how indigenous peoples have responded to the multi-faceted challenges of climate change and development.

Mr. Phrang Roy, of The Christensen Fund introduced the concept of the Community Dialogues - to provide a space to discuss challenges and responses to climate change and to identify innovative practices that protect indigenous culture and identity. Mr. Deodat Maharaj, Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, UNDP opened the dialogue by stressing UNDP's continuing engagement with indigenous peoples, and its flagship programme on indigenous peoples' rights and development, RIPP. The Dialogues are implemented with the support of The Christensen Fund.

Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Chairperson of the UNPFII delivered the keynote speech stressing the need for greater recognition of indigenous peoples and their contribution to bio-diversity at policy and decision-making processes. Indigenous peoples have much to share, and are the main stewards of the environment; their bio-cultural practices and natural resource management techniques are important in this era of climate change.

Indigenous leaders from five eco-systems presented the discussions, findings and best practices of their communities in retaining their cultural landscapes while at the same time tackling the multi-dimensional and often inter-woven challenges of globalization, development and environmental degradation which are often the leading causes for climate change:

Mr. Kamardi of AMAN, Indonesia described the impact wrought by the changing climate on the environment of the indigenous peoples in Lombok, Indonesia. He highlighted mitigation and adaptation measures the community is taking such as

tree planting, crop diversification, promoting organic farming etc. He also mentioned the impact development can bring, if not according to indigenous values and traditions.

This was reaffirmed by Mr. Mani Swapan Dewan of TAUN-GYA, Bangladesh who drew attention to the urgent need to revitalize the cultural identity, and protect the bio-diversity of indigenous peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Mr. Dewan stressed the multi-dimensional aspects of environment, development and climate change and that they are inter-related and have follow on causal impacts. He recommended support for the implementation of the CHT Peace Accord 1997, sustainable development, and the preservation and promotion of indigenous culture, practices and traditions (many of which are under threat).

Mr. Matthew Tauli of CPA, Philippines highlighted various traditional knowledge and practices of the indigenous peoples in the Cordilleras that have been instrumental in preserving the landscapes and bio-diversity, for example, the rice terraces of Ifugao.

Ms. Mary Giun of PACOS, Malaysia presented a documentary showing the revitalization of TAGAL – an indigenous system of sustainable fisheries and watershed management that has been successful in adapting to the challenges of the changing environment and climate.

Tokiwaio Blah from Meghalaya, India advocated that indigenous peoples' shifting cultivation, contrary to some widely held beliefs, is sustainable and an important element in preserving indigenous peoples' bio-cultural landscapes. He described how indigenous practices and innovations are adapted to accommodate climate change and yet retain their distinct cultural identity.

This was followed by an interactive dialogue with comments, queries and stories. Mr. Phrang Roy, who chaired the session, stressed the importance of highlighting indigenous peoples' good practices and successes in responding to the various challenges of climate change. Ms. Joan Carling of the Asia Indigenous Peoples' Caucus and Mr. Suikhar of Asia Indigenous Peoples' Pact gave the closing remarks. The dialogue was organized in close cooperation with The Christensen Fund, the Asia Indigenous Peoples' Caucus and the Asia Indigenous Peoples' Pact.

