



Applying a Rights-Based Approach to Indigenous Peoples in Conservation

Eighth Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), New York, 18-29 May 2009

Item 3(a) of the Provisional Agenda – Economic and Social Development

Madame Chair,

On behalf of IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, I congratulate you and the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues for your successful work on promoting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and its implementation.

I would like to take the opportunity to speak about recent developments in IUCN towards the development and integration of rights-based approaches to conservation, including with respect to indigenous peoples. We have also submitted a more complete report to the Secretariat, which will be made available in the room.

Indigenous peoples' rights, and rights based approaches more generally, were prominently featured at IUCN's IVth World Conservation Congress (WCC) in October 2008 in Barcelona, where indigenous participants had a prominent role and where IUCN had the pleasure to welcoming you, Madam Chair, other members of the Permanent Forum, and many other distinguished indigenous leaders. The Congress is one of the world's largest conservation events; and the 4th WCC brought together over 8000 individuals from IUCN member organizations, Commissions, Secretariat, indigenous and local communities, UN Agencies, private businesses, and others.

As the first Congress since the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the UN General Assembly, the Declaration was highly profiled as a guiding framework for conservation work taking place in the lands, territories and resources of indigenous peoples. The Members' Assembly of the Congress adopted several relevant resolutions, including one endorsing the Declaration and calling on IUCN members to endorse it or adopt it as appropriate. At the Congress, IUCN members also took decisions upholding standards for free, prior and informed consent. Indeed IUCN has a clear policy to promote respect to the free, prior informed consent of indigenous peoples in relation to the interventions of the private sector which may affect the lands, territories and resources of indigenous peoples, and consistently promotes this principle in its relationships with the private sector.

Other relevant decisions of the IUCN Congress concerned supporting the fair restitution of land and natural resource rights of indigenous peoples whenever they had been lost for conservation reasons. An important set of decisions by the IUCN Congress concerned the integration of the concept of Indigenous Conservation Territories (ICTs) in its International System of Categories of Protected Areas: Indigenous Conservation Territories are recognized as indigenous peoples' owned and managed territories that fulfil objectives of protected areas and that are based on their right of self-determination; it is a legitimate indigenous self-government system, including in places where protected areas have been superimposed over the territories of indigenous peoples. The Congress called on governments and other actors to support indigenous peoples in protecting their Indigenous Conservation Territories against external threats.

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IUCN is the world's oldest and
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partners in public, NGO and
private sectors around the
world.

Emerging mechanisms for Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) were another key issue at the IUCN Congress. IUCN adopted a resolution which urges all IUCN members and Parties to the UNFCCC to ensure equitable participation of indigenous peoples with particular emphasis on ensuring rights, land tenure, livelihood benefits and poverty reduction and to apply effective social safeguards to protect the rights of indigenous peoples.

IUCN emphasizes that REDD, and all climate change response measures, must be carried out in ways that respect human rights, including indigenous peoples rights. As part of this, IUCN believes that a rights-based approach to REDD could enhance its political viability and reduce risks of reversal.

Initial discussions on rights-based approaches are beginning to be taken up more broadly in the conservation community. It is clear that rights-based approaches to conservation will need to integrate elements such as collective rights, free, prior and informed consent, self-determination, tenure, resource, cultural, gender-related and development rights. However, it is also clear that much further work is needed to clarify and operationalize these approaches.

Though attention to rights-based approaches to climate change is now increasing, and upcoming responses in designing international climate change responses cannot ignore the rights dimensions of climate change, official discussions and formulations of plans for mitigation and adaptation to climate change are still giving insufficient attention to the particular vulnerability and rights of indigenous peoples.

One critical factor in developing and implementing rights-based approaches is capacity building, and we recognize that much more is needed. The links between climate change, conservation, and indigenous peoples' rights must be better understood by rights-holders and duty-bearers, including decision-makers, the conservation community, and others who are to be held accountable.

IUCN will continue to work on developing and integrating rights-based approaches into its programme and to support its members and the conservation community to better consider the rights of indigenous peoples in conservation, especially around the urgent matters of developing appropriate climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.

Thank you, Madame Chair.