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State responsibility to uphold rights of indigenous people stressed at UN forum



Dalee Sambo Dorrough speaks at a press conference

18 May 2011 –

United Nations Member States have the responsibility to uphold the human rights principles outlined in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a member of the UN forum focusing on the issues said today, adding that violations of the fundamental rights of those communities persist.

“First and foremost, the nation Member States of the United Nations are to take the initial obligation to begin to adopt policies and legislation... to maintain consistence with the human rights standards that are embraced in the declaration,” said Dalee Sambo Dorrough, a member of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, at a press conference at UN Headquarters.

She said the direct and often brutal violations of the basic rights of indigenous people in every region of the world continue, even in areas where success had been achieved, such as in Canada where an agreement over land use between the aboriginal communities in Nunavut has faced implementation hitches.

“The reality of the UN declaration is that the rights of indigenous people did not arise out of the goodwill of States,” said Ms. Dorrough.

“Rather, it is because of the entire history of exploitation, colonization, as well as the full range of human rights violations that the indigenous community has pressed the UN to open its doors in order to for us to take our rightful place not only in the context of the human rights pillar of the UN, but also in the environment, as well as the peace and security pillar,” she told reporters on the sidelines of deliberations in the two-week Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

The forum is aimed at advancing the rights of the estimated 370 million indigenous people worldwide. More than 1,300 delegates are participating.

Edward Tunyon, an indigenous rights activist from Tanzania, highlighted the plight of pastoralist communities in his country, who, he said, have been losing land as other communities encroached upon their villages and authorities seized land for commercial or wildlife conservations purposes.

This year’s forum is focusing on reviewing progress made on issues ranging from economic and social development to the environment and whether indigenous peoples have given free, prior and informed consent to decisions affecting their communities.

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