

Indigenous peoples

Uphold traditional fishing rights

This statement of the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity was made at the recent CBD meet

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am pleased to present this statement on behalf of the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity.

For indigenous peoples, lands and seas are interconnected. The seas and coastal areas are not only culturally and economically important, but also have deep spiritual significance. Often the sea and marine species are considered ancestors. Coastal indigenous peoples still practise ceremonies, and use sea water and marine life for medicinal purposes, navigation and many other purposes.

Indigenous peoples are rights holders to our lands, waters and resources in coastal territories and marine areas and are concerned about actions taken by States to attempt to extinguish the rights of indigenous peoples to the foreshore and seabed. Our traditional fishing rights extend into the high seas and are not limited to legally defined national boundaries.

For the programme of work to be meaningful at all, the elements, operational objectives, activities and policy development must include the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples. There must be promotion of the wider application of indigenous knowledge regarding the customary use of biological resources compatible with conservation and sustainable use in accordance with Article 10(c).

Indigenous peoples welcome the basic principles for the programme of work that are consistent with Article 8(j). Recognizing the Secretariat's efforts to create a roster of experts, we look forward to the significant inclusion of regional indigenous experts from communities

whose lifeways are dependent on marine and coastal biodiversity.

We support the use of human and social indicators in the development of guidelines for ecosystem evaluation and assessment, with particular focus on the impacts on indigenous peoples. In particular, we encourage holding regional workshops in Small Island Developing States with the ways and means provided to make these meetings accessible to indigenous peoples from those States.

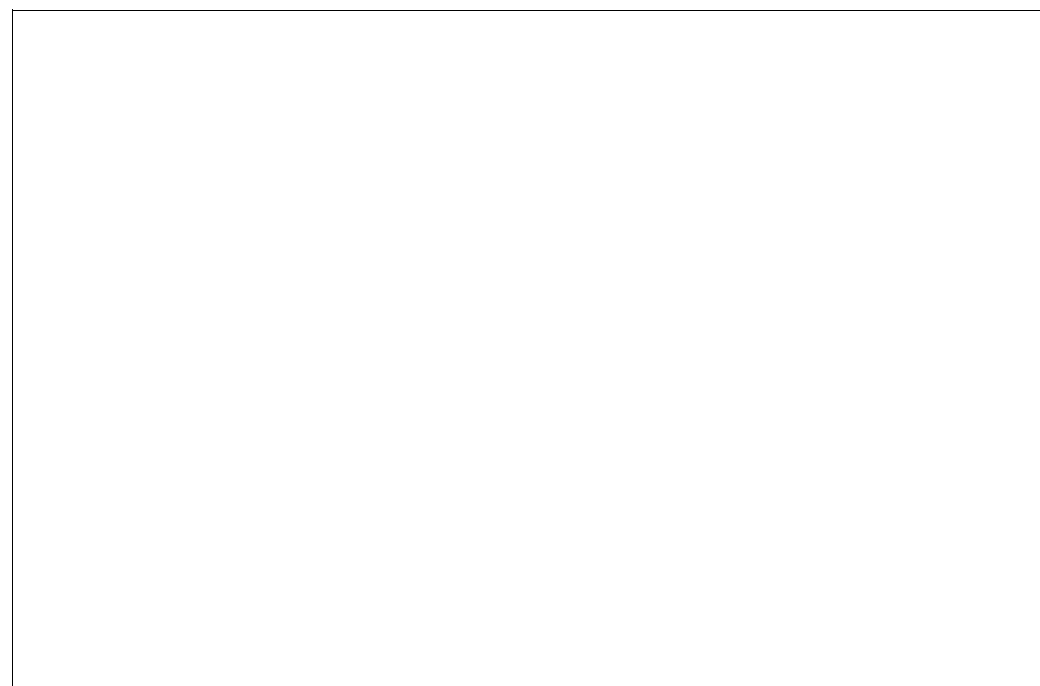
Reference is made to deep-sea genetic resources beyond the limits of national jurisdictions. Although States may consider areas outside their Exclusive Economic Zones as beyond their national jurisdiction, indigenous peoples have never relinquished our rights to these areas. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea has failed to uphold the rights of indigenous peoples.

Indigenous peoples have consistently called for a moratorium on bioprospecting until rights to our genetic resources and indigenous knowledge are recognized. Thus, we cannot support activities to share information that will prejudice our rights in this respect.

Marine protected areas

Indigenous peoples fully appreciate the need and value of marine protected areas. Indeed, we have created our own marine protected areas according to our customary law for millennia. These customary marine protected areas should be respected, protected and promoted.

The vast majority of coasts are, or were, at one time, under traditional marine tenure. In no way can marine protected areas, established in the name of conservation, prevent access to the very peoples who



have conserved and sustainably managed these areas. In particular, our customary rights to harvest mammals for subsistence and economic purposes in a sustainable manner must be recognized and protected. Policies for marine protected areas must be consistent with international human rights laws and standards.

We would like to see a stronger linkage between the programmes of work on marine and coastal waters and that on inland waters. Habitat fragmentation must be avoided in order to recognize the interrelationship between those species that depend upon marine and inland waters and terrestrial areas—an understanding that indigenous peoples have recognized for generation and generations.

We look forward to participating in further work under this thematic programme. Thank you, Mr. Chair. 🍄

This statement on marine and coastal biological diversity was made by the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB) under Agenda Item: 18.2 at the COP7, Kuala Lumpur, 9-20 February 2004