

FORO INTERNACIONAL INDIGENA SOBRE DIVERSIDAD
INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS FORUM ON BIODIVERSITY (IIFB)

Convention on Biological Diversity
Conference of the Parties
Eighth Meeting
Curitiba, Brasil, 20 – 31 March 2006

Opening Statement

20 March 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. This statement is made on behalf of the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB).

First, we would like to recognize and honor the traditional sovereigns and owners of this land, the Kaingáng, Guarani, Xokleng, and Xetá Indigenous peoples. We also recognize and pay respect to the more than 230 Indigenous peoples that form part of the mega social diversity of Brasil and who conserve in their territories the most important biodiversity hotspots in Brasil. Also, we express our special appreciation to the shamans, pajes, tuxas, kujas, and spiritual leaders who are lending their spiritual force and invoking with their sacred songs to the music of the maracas the blessings of the Creator to guide a successful COP8.

We also thank the Government of Brasil, the State of Parana, and City of Curitiba for hosting COP8.

We are very proud to announce that the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity, has more than 100 participants of Indigenous peoples and local communities from all over the world. Mr. Chairperson, the vast majority of our Forum is able to participate through our own fundraising efforts and the generosity of both private and government donations.

The right to self-determination and the right to sovereignty of Indigenous over our territories and natural resources are the fundamental principles upon which we assert our inherent, inalienable, and perpetual collective rights over our traditional knowledge, biodiversity and genetic resources.

We are concerned that the implementation of decisions over CBD Programmes of Work at the level of national governments regarding protected areas, forest parks, and environmental services are solely based on privatization policies, and in this way life and nature of which we are a part are commodified.

Indigenous peoples have struggled for centuries under colonial governments and many continue to struggle for political, social, cultural and economic survival in colonial

situations. Many other Indigenous peoples now live within independent, but developing nations, but are subject to the forces of neo-colonialism. We are concerned by the departure from the true objectives of the CBD, namely to conserve and sustain our world's biodiversity for the benefit of future generations. The CBD has been co-opted as a vehicle for neo-colonialism and threatens to undermine our fundamental human rights to territories, lands, waters and natural resources, and even the traditional knowledge within our own minds. Many governments have unjustly asserted sovereignty over our lands, but we persist to assert our inherent, inalienable and proprietary rights consistent with our right of self-determination and permanent sovereignty over natural resources.

In the upcoming two weeks we will offer specific recommendations to the Parties in the various working groups, but offer these general comments now.

Retirement of Decisions

The IIFB is very concerned by the recommendations from the Executive Secretary to retire numerous decisions. We are concerned that retiring many of these decisions would have the effect of discarding 10 years of work, especially in regards to Article 8(j) and Related Provisions. Furthermore, in some cases, these decisions still remain unimplemented. We strongly urge Parties ensure the full and effective participation of Indigenous peoples in all processes related to any proposed retirement of priority decisions relevant to Indigenous peoples' rights.

Article 8(j) and Related Provisions

COP 8 is considering Article 8j and Related Provisions as an item for in-depth review. The Programme of work was adopted in 2000 and since then the IIFB has been working to advise the parties for its implementation and advancement. We are disappointed in seeing that the much-needed in-depth review was not adequately done in the inter-sessional period. Some achievements have been made under this programme of work and the WG 8j, but the IIFB review has particularly noted the lack of implementation at the national and local levels where biodiversity loss is happening. Related provisions such as 10c on customary sustainable use have not yet been addressed. Other important areas such as Indicators, Communication, Education, and Public Awareness related to WG8j are yet to be developed. We therefore request the continuation of work under WG8(j), a more in-depth review, and the strengthening of this work area under the CBD.

We propose that significant recommendations made by other CBD subsidiary bodies pertaining to WG8j from of the SBSTTA and other Working Groups be consolidated not for the consideration of the 8th COP under the Agenda item on Review of WG8j and Related Provisions. We will work with the Secretariat and the Bureau to highlight these key recommendations for incorporation into the decisions to be made by COP8.

We therefore call for the continuation of the work under WG8j and a deeper review and strengthening of this area of work under the CBD.

Parties must implement the crucial COP7 decision mandating the Working Groups on Article 8(j) and ABS to collaborate, in order to make recommendations to entrench protection of Indigenous peoples' rights within the proposed international regime

Access to Genetic Resources and Benefit Sharing

We have several concerns about the proposed international regime on ABS. Parties must recognize and protect the rights of Indigenous peoples to our traditional knowledge and genetic resources originating in our territories and land and waters traditionally used and occupied by Indigenous peoples. Without explicit recognition and protection of the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities, there can be no respect, preservation or maintenance of traditional knowledge for future generations.

We continue to be concerned that states are misinterpreting their rights over natural resources that we have preserved. International law and human rights norms demonstrate that there exists a developed legal principle that indigenous peoples have a collective right to the lands and territories they traditionally use and occupy. This includes the right to use, possess, administer and control the natural resources found on them. By virtue of this collective right, States are obligated to respect, protect, and promote the governmental and property interests of Indigenous peoples (as collectivities) in their natural resources.

Accordingly, we reiterate our previous statements that any international regime on ABS must be consistent with international human rights law.

Genetic Use Restriction Technologies (GURTs)

Indigenous Peoples' knowledge, innovations and practices have developed and improved plant species for agriculture and medicinal uses for millennia, contributing to both biological and cultural diversity. We assert that the potential negative impacts of GURTs pose a direct threat to our self-determination and food sovereignty and requires the ongoing implementation of the precautionary principle. We strongly urge Parties and Governments to reaffirm Decision V/5. A renewed mandate to insure a lasting ban on any field testing and commercial use of GURTs is critical. Any decision that allows for a case-by-case evaluation of GURTs would be a violation of our fundamental human rights.

Participation of Indigenous Women

We remind the Parties that Indigenous women are key to the conservation to our biological diversity, traditional knowledge, our cultures and languages, which they have passed on from generation to generation. However, Indigenous women are concerned that the continuous loss of biodiversity due to inappropriate policies has resulted in the abuse

of resources, climate change, extractive industries, and over-harvesting. This loss of biodiversity causes social, economic, cultural, environmental, and health problems to Indigenous peoples, including displacement.

Island Biodiversity Programme of Work

Islands across the world are home to thousands of Indigenous peoples who are the rightful owners and caretakers of island biodiversity. The three meetings that developed this new programme of work on island biodiversity occurred with almost no participation of Indigenous peoples independent from government delegations. It is, therefore, our demand that the COP8 ensure our full and effective participation, and for the Parties to recognize our rights as Indigenous peoples and local communities in the programme of work.

Indicators

The International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB) has undertaken some practical steps to strengthen the implementation of the CBD's Strategic Plan and 2010 target. We have established the IIFB Working Group on Indicators to support the Working on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions develop a limited number of meaningful and practical indicators.

The IIFB Working Group on Indicators has developed a concrete and structured proposal to develop these indicators in a comprehensive and holistic manner in close collaboration with the CBD, which we will be forwarding for Parties to consider and decide upon at COP8. We feel that this is one area, among others, where a close partnership between the CBD and indigenous peoples can be developed.

Communications, Education, and Public Awareness

Indigenous peoples have prioritized communication, education and public awareness (CEPA) in our programme of work. However, we are concerned that we have never been included in the informal advisory committee on CEPA. The IIFB should play a key role in the implementation of CEPA in order to insure the full and effective participation of Indigenous peoples. CEPA prioritizes the development of messages to overcome information gaps and we believe that a fundamental message is precisely the central role of Indigenous peoples in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the IIFB looks forward to working with the Parties in the spirit of trust, mutual respect, and collaboration over the next two weeks. Thank you Mr. Chairman.