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Subcommission on Prevention of
Discrimination and Protection of
Minorities
Technical Meeting on the "International
Decade on the World's Indigenous People"
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Geneva, Switzerland

Statement by the World Bank

Presented by Lars T. Soeftestad

The World Bank strongly supports the initiative to declare an International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, commencing on 10 December 1994. The present period devoted to planning the content and activities of the Decade is extremely important for a successful Decade. The World Bank is honored to be invited to participate in this Technical Meeting which aims at creating a detailed plan of action for the Decade.

The World Bank established a "Bankwide Task Force on the 1993 United Nations International Year of the World's Indigenous People." Throughout the International Year, the Task Force participated in various inter-agency consultations. The Task Force organized various activities at the Bank during the International Year. On this occasion special reference should be made to a conference on "Traditional Knowledge & Sustainable Development" that took place on 27-28 September 1994 in Washington. A number of invited indigenous representatives from Africa as well as Latin America and Asia and discussed the topic of the conference with reference to local conditions and experiences. A number of case studies on participation and natural resource management was also presented and discussed in an integrated manner. The proceedings of the conference will be published shortly.

The activities internationally in the area of indigenous rights is growing steadily. The concerns of indigenous peoples is

already an important concern in all the Bank's regions, that is in Latin America, Africa and Asia. We are now seeing a gradual development whereby these concerns are becoming important also within the various sectors. Indigenous concerns are today being taken more serious in areas like for example involuntary resettlement, participation, social assessment, and natural resource management projects.

This relatively new development is in large measure correlated with recent work on the policy side. One case in point is the Operational Directive on Involuntary Resettlement that gives special consideration to indigenous peoples. In April of this year, the Bank's Task Force on Involuntary Resettlement presented its report "Resettlement and Development" that reviews all Bank projects involving involuntary resettlement in the period 1986-93. In discussing impoverishment and declining standards of living, the report states unequivocally that indigenous peoples are among the vulnerable groups that have more exposure to the risks of economic and habitat displacement, and that understanding the risks specific to different peoples helps explain how impoverishment occurs and what must be done to effectively avoid these risks in the future operations.

Above all, there is the Operational Directive on Indigenous Peoples, which in essence says that a special Indigenous Peoples Development Plan should be prepared in all cases involving indigenous peoples as project beneficiaries or stakeholders. While this Directive is considered sound and correct, operational staff in the Bank's regional offices often are at a loss how to apply the Directive to a concrete project situation. In an effort to comply with this lacunae, the Bank's three regions are now embarking upon specific work aimed at applying the Directive, in a sense establishing guidelines for how to use the Directive. The work is taking different shapes, as well as proceeding at a different pace,

in the three regions, reflecting in part different needs. The first results are expected next year.

The nexus of indigenous peoples and informed participation is increasingly being emphasized in the Bank's work. This is connected with the realization of the importance of local knowledge for cultural compatibility and long-term sustainability. It is also connected with the importance of creating some degree of local ownership and control over project activities. Currently a Participation Sourcebook is being put together that aim at giving concrete guidance to operational staff on the various tasks and problems that may be encountered in planning projects that will affect local peoples. One chapter deals with indigenous peoples. Here, an effort has been made to be as direct and relevant as possible. Various topics focussed upon include: (a) devising appropriate consultation procedures, (b) recognizing land and natural resource rights, (c) building upon subsistence lifestyles, (d) using indigenous institutions, (e) investing in culture and communication, (f) strengthening local capacity and (g) financing indigenous development. It is expected that operational staff, as well as others involved with developing work affecting indigenous peoples, will find this chapter concrete and helpful, while at the same time not forsaking any of the existing crosscultural complexity.

While the World Bank traditionally works in development aid in collaborating with the various Borrowers, the Bank does realize that funding is necessary for the many activities planned for the Decade. Towards this, the Bank would like to point to its Small Grants Program as one potential source of funding for some of the Decade activities.

The Small Grants Program was created in 1983 to promote dialogue on international development issues of particular concern to the World Bank. It aims at supporting a multitude of different causes. Any institution concerned about development can apply for a

grant. Most grants are awarded to non-governmental organizations. Applications from developing-country institutions are especially welcome. During fiscal 1992, US\$ 500,000 was disbursed to 43 different organizations around the world, including 28 based in developing countries.

Grants are intended to support activities that promote discussion and dissemination of information on the broad range of development issues of interest to the World Bank. It is preferred that its grants catalyze contributions from other sources. Activities that received grants in fiscal years 1993 and 1994 include: (a) international indigenous people's conference on "Protection of the Treasures of the Ancestors" (Aotearoa, New Zealand), (b) participation of indigenous people's groups in 11th Inter-American Indian Congress (Managua, Nicaragua), (c) regional seminar on "The Health of Indigenous Peoples in the Amazon Region" (Lima, Peru), (d) seminar on indigenous adult education in rural areas (Panajachel, Guatemala), and (e) "International Conference on Indigenous Peoples and Water Resource Development Projects" (Montreal, Canada). Indigenous peoples' organizations are especially encouraged to consider whether the Small Grants Program might be of interest to applying to for any specific Decade activities they would like to realize.

The momentum that was built up during the International Year will now be channeled into the Decade. The World Bank compliments the United Nations on its decision to establish the Decade, and will follow the coming process of the detailed planning of the Decade, as well as the Decade itself, closely.