

The Leticia Declaration and Proposals for Actions

All peoples are descendants of the forest. When the forest dies we die. We are given responsibility to maintain balance within the natural world. When any part is destroyed, all balance is cast into chaos. When the last tree is gone, and the last river is dead, then people will learn that we cannot eat gold and silver. To nurture the land is our obligation to our ancestors, who passed this to us for future generations.

PREAMBLE

We, participants of the International Meeting of Indigenous Peoples and Other Forest - Dependent Peoples on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests,

Recognising that Indigenous Peoples enjoy the right of self-determination and by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development;

Recognising that forests are the homes of many Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent peoples and are fundamental to their survival as distinct peoples, forming the basis for their livelihoods, cultures and spirituality;

Recognising that nearly all forests are inhabited;

Recognising that the maintenance of cultural diversity and the welfare of Indigenous Peoples and forest-dependent peoples is a fundamental aspect of sustainable forest management;

Recognising that secure and long-term guarantees to lands and territories is essential to sustainable forest management;

Recognising that human rights, sustainable forest management and peace are interdependent and indivisible;

Recognising, therefore, that the interests of Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent peoples should have priority in any decisions about forests:

Therefore this meeting calls upon Governments, Intergovernmental Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations and Major Groups involved in implementing Agenda 21, to support the following principles, conclusions and proposals for action:

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

That the rights, welfare, viewpoints and interests of Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent peoples should be central to all decision-making about forests at local, national, regional and international levels;

That their rights to their lands, territories, forests and other natural resources should be recognised, secured, respected and protected;

That they should have full control over the management, use and conservation of these resources;

That the representative institutions of Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent peoples should be fully recognised and respected;

That Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent peoples need strong and autonomous organisations and support for the consolidation of indigenous systems and cultural institutions;

That new mechanisms should be established to ensure the equal participation of Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent peoples in decision-making on forests at all levels;

That Indigenous Peoples and other forest peoples constitute an important cross-cutting theme in the forest agenda, affecting many other issues;

That United Nations bodies, when dealing with Indigenous issues, should not narrowly work on sectoral themes but continue to engage in dialogue to enhance mutually enriching discussions, and to strengthen co-ordination;

That there should be wholehearted support for the current Draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples being discussed by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, and its relevance for the goals of sustainable development and sustainable forest management;

That these principles shall be applied in the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.

National Forest and Land Use Programmes should promote broad participation and be decentralised to ensure a wide involvement in implementation;

Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent peoples must play an integral part in national forest and land use planning;

Rights to and respect for Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent peoples' lands and territories and tenure systems must be guaranteed in forms appropriate to them;

Within the framework of national and regional planning, decisions on land use must be devolved to the local level so that Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent peoples can assert effective customary systems of sustainable forest management;

Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent peoples' rights to rotational farming, hunting, gathering, fishing, grazing and other land use should be respected and secured within national land use and forest programmes;

All forest and land use planning activities that affect Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent peoples must fully respect their customary systems of dispute settlement;

National land use and forest programmes should uphold international standards on the rights of indigenous peoples, with due consideration for the wishes of the Peoples concerned, including appropriate national legislation and implementation.

National governments are urged to respect indigenous communities and cultures across national frontiers and not continue with practices which divide Indigenous Peoples.

Proposals for Action

1. The IPF should acknowledge the importance of indigenous land use and resource rights, as well as customary law and indigenous legal systems, as inherently related to the forest issue.

2. To establish participatory mechanisms for national forest and land use planning which include the following elements:

Equal access and full participation by Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent peoples in national land use planning and forest programmes, at all stages of planning, implementation, monitoring, assessment and evaluation.

Initiatives, programmes and projects must take into account customary land use and tenure systems of Indigenous and other forest dependent peoples, including rotational farming, hunting, gathering, fishing, grazing and others.

No activities must take place on Indigenous Peoples' territories without their full and informed consent through their representative institutions, including the power of veto.

No activities for resource utilisation or conservation, including the establishment of protected areas, must be initiated on lands of Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent peoples without security and full respect for their territorial rights.

Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent peoples must be included in the decision making process at all levels in all areas which affect them, including policy decisions of international development agencies, multilateral development banks and all trans-national corporations.

Any benefits from territories of Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent Peoples must primarily be for their own local use and in accordance with principles of benefit-sharing established by them.

Underlying Causes of Deforestation and Forest Degradation:

Deforestation and forest degradation is exacerbated by a lack of understanding of the holistic worldviews and ways of life of Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent peoples;

The underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation which urgently need to be addressed include the following:

The failure of governments and other institutions to recognise and respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent Peoples to their territorial lands, forests and other resources;

The increasing problem of landlessness among impoverished peasants who are denied access to land outside forest areas due to inequitable land ownership patterns, and who also have no alternate economic opportunities;

Government policies and those of private sector industry are geared to exploit forest and mineral resources to the fullest extent for purely economic gain. These policies are often incompatible with other existing forest conservation policies. Such policies include substituting forests with industrial tree plantation for the pulp industry; oil and gas exploration by trans-national corporations; uncontrolled mining operations, and establishing nuclear waste storage sites on indigenous territories.

Proposals for Action

1. Genuine participatory mechanisms need to be developed which allow Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent peoples a decisive voice in evaluations of deforestation processes and the evolution of appropriate policy responses.
2. Governments and other institutions are urged to pursue measures which can reduce pressure from industrial societies on forests by, inter alia, reducing consumption, reusing, recycling and substituting forest products as appropriate.

Traditional Forest Related Knowledge:

Traditional forest-related knowledge is essential to sustainable forest management practices;

Traditional forest-related Knowledge is intimately bound up with Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent peoples' ownership and control of their lands and territories and their continued management, use and conservation of all types of forests.

The contributions of women in the development, promotion and protection of indigenous knowledge must be acknowledged and supported;

The ownership of Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent peoples of their forest related traditional knowledge and contemporary innovations should be recognised and secured;

Traditional knowledge must remain alive, cultures must continue to develop, and indigenous contemporary knowledge and technologies must also be respected;

Use of this knowledge should not be made without the prior informed consent of the Peoples concerned;

Indigenous Peoples oppose the patenting of life forms, sacred plants and the Human Genome Diversity Project and the imposition of private intellectual property rights on collective indigenous knowledge and resources.

Proposals for action

1. New legislative frameworks and sui generis systems that recognise and effectively protect the cultural heritage and traditional forest related knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent peoples must be established. These must be based on customary law and

governance structures.

2. To note and support the actions and recommendations agreed by the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity during its third meeting relating to the implementation of Article 8j and other related areas.

3 To establish in the Amazon region a world university of Indigenous Peoples with the support of the international community. This University shall function under the direct administration of the Indigenous Peoples with the purpose to study, promote and protect Indigenous cultures, cosmovision and traditional knowledge. It shall be open to all peoples and cultures.

4. IPF4 should support the Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of the Heritage of Indigenous Peoples contained in the Final Report of the Special Rapporteur, Mrs. Erica- Irene Daes (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1995/26) covering definitions, transmission of heritage, recovery and restitution of heritage, national programmes and legislation, researchers and scholarly institutions, business and industry, artists, writers and performers, public information and education and international organisations.

5. To undertake a series of expert meetings under the auspices of the CSD on sustainable development and territorial management, and the related issues of partnerships, agreements and legal frameworks for cultural heritage protection.

6. National governments and the international community are urged to support education programmes which promote the sustainable forest management practices of Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent Peoples.

7. To implement broad technical capacity-building programmes on sustainable land use and forest management, giving special attention to settlers.

8. To support information exchange programmes between Indigenous Peoples and local communities on issues of intellectual and cultural rights, knowledge, innovations and practices.

9. To develop association agreements on sustainable forest management between Indigenous Peoples, other forest-dependent Peoples and groups living in the forest.

10. To establish an information centre and dissemination system to enable Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent peoples to access all relevant information. Efforts should be made to make this information freely and widely available in languages and forms accessible to Indigenous Peoples.

Financial Assistance and Technology Transfer:

Proposals for Action

1. Financial assistance and mechanisms must be publicly accountable, transparent and unconditional. The IPF must also create possibilities for Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent Peoples to design their own financial mechanisms.

2. Indigenous Peoples and forest dependent peoples should directly access and receive technical assistance and support upon their own request. When such assistance is proposed by government agencies and other bodies it should only proceed with the approval of the Indigenous

Peoples and forest dependent peoples.

3. Donor criteria should go beyond project financing, and also support the capacity and institution-building of Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent Peoples.

4. To set up an independent fund to enable Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent peoples to enjoy full participation in the international forest policy debate. The funding mechanism must ensure independent, fair and equitable participation from all regions and all types of forests. Indigenous Peoples must be part of the administration of this fund.

Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management:

All criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management and certification principles must secure the spiritual, cultural, social and material well-being of Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent peoples.

Proposals for Action

1. Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent peoples should be supported to carry out their own inventory of forest resources, and to define locally appropriate criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management.

International Instruments and Mechanisms:

All future international instruments and mechanisms dealing with forests should involve Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent peoples in all stages of decision-making as equal partners.

The key areas that need to be addressed are participation and representation at the international level, access to relevant information and funding. In order to effectively participate in decision making processes, governments and other institutions must provide necessary support to help strengthen organisations of Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent peoples.

Proposals for Action:

1. Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent peoples must continue to have improved representation at all upcoming UN forums in the immediate future including IPF4, CSD 5 and the Special Session of the UN General Assembly in June 1997. All these meetings should register our participation as "Indigenous Peoples", a recognised Major Group in the implementation of Agenda 21.

2. Full support should be given to establishing a UN Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples during the UN Decade for Indigenous Peoples which will draw together human rights, environment and development issues.

3. Agenda 21 and the Forest Principles should be interpreted to harmonise with the UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, with particular emphasis on the use of the term "peoples" in its documentation.

ACTION COMMITMENTS

The participants committed themselves to undertake concrete plan of action including the following:

Identification of concrete participatory mechanisms for Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent peoples to ensure full and equal participation in any post IPF forest processes and also the Convention on Biological Diversity;

Creation of a global, regional and local network for the flow of appropriate information and proposals for action;

Plan and seek support for a programme of action to facilitate Indigenous Peoples and forest dependent peoples

Identification of locally appropriate criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management; Preparation of proposals for the inclusion of traditional forest-related knowledge by Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent peoples into tertiary education and professional training programmes within all nations; Prepare proposals at the national level for the education of all peoples, especially the young people about forest destruction and degradation and the role of Indigenous Peoples and forest-dependent peoples in managing and protecting our forest resources;

Prepare proposals for regional meetings between Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent peoples and UN-agencies and other bodies to explore the implications of international instruments and agreements at the national and local level; National Indigenous Peoples' organisations should consider forming alliances with universities to create national forums for research, study and action.

CONCLUSIONS

The meeting requests the IPF to incorporate these principles and proposals for action in the final IPF Report during its fourth session.

The meeting also requested that the Leticia Declaration and Proposals for Action also be considered by the UN Commission on Sustainable Development during the 5th Session, the General Assembly Special Session and all other international forest policy deliberations.

The meeting requested the broadest dissemination of the Leticia Declaration and Proposals for Action to all relevant bodies.