

Opening

Georges Midré, *Forum for Development Cooperation with Indigenous Peoples*

On behalf of the Forum Conference Board I wish you all welcome to the ninth conference convened by the Forum for Development Cooperation with Indigenous Peoples. This year's conference will focus on indigenous peoples and climate changes.

The climate is changing; there can be no doubt about it. The reasons for these changes are not quite clear, but most of the experts agree that the climate changes we observe are man-made, at least to an important extent. Whatever their causes, we will all be affected by the changes in the climate. Some groups of people, however, will be affected more than others. They are those whose lives are most tightly linked to nature, people that are not sheltered in urban areas, or protected by more or less sophisticated devices that isolate them from the rhythms of seasonal variations or the consequences of natural catastrophes.

The category of “Indigenous peoples” covers human peoples that are quite different regarding lifestyles, the way communities are organised, their languages, or the kinds of environments they live in. But one of the common markers that define indigenous peoples relates to their proximity to nature in a material, concrete sense. About half of the indigenous peoples of the world live in rural areas as hunters, gatherers, fishermen and farmers. Climate changes will in many cases have a powerful impact on their lives, and their ability to adapt to these changes are vital.

Last year's Forum conference focused urbanisation processes among indigenous peoples. This is an issue that is increasingly important since estimates indicate that half of the world's indigenous populations now live in urban areas. Indigenous peoples in urban settings, like their brothers and sisters living in rural areas have strong symbolic links to nature, and these bonds are fundamental regarding how identities are shaped. To mention just one example from our region: the Plan of the Sami Parliament for the period 2002-2005 stated: ‘The Sami culture is closely related to nature, both spiritually and practically’. It also says that ‘large parts of the Sami value foundations are attached to a life close to nature’ (2002: 3-4).

The indigenous populations in urban areas are, however, often concentrated in areas that are least suitable for settlement. They live in areas threatened by flooding, landslides or other kinds of environmental hazards. Generally speaking, urban indigenous populations are, therefore, more exposed to the detrimental effects of climate changes than other groups.

As you will see the programme for this conference is structured in four parts. We have asked for papers that will trace some of the reasons for the climate changes and their actual and potential effects on the lives of indigenous peoples. In the second part we will focus on the rainforests, since there is widespread deforestation which is threatening both the global atmospheric equilibrium, as well as the existence of the indigenous peoples living in the rainforests. In the third part of the conference we will discuss how the effects of climate changes can be mitigated, as well as how the indigenous peoples experiences and knowledge can help us all, both indigenous and non-indigenous, to adapt to changes in natural environments. Next, we have invited

shorter presentations for under the heading of Forum update. Finally, Jens Dahl from IWGIA will give a summary of the conference.

We are very pleased to be able to welcome the new Guatemalan ambassador to Norway, his Excellency Juan León Alvarado. He has a long history of working in Mayan and other human rights organizations in Guatemala, as well as being candidate for the vice- presidency for one of the centre-left parties in the 1995 elections. We are grateful for the presence of Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, the head of the UN permanent forum for Indigenous Issues, coming directly from Manila, and the President of the Sami Parliament, Egil Olli.

There are others who have travelled far to be here with us. Let me just mention Mina Susana Setra from the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago, Indonesia, Jeffrey Ross from the University of Montana, Eduardo Sacayón from USAC, Guatemala, Maria Das Dores Gorete Da Silva and Matheus de Assuncoa from the MST Movement in Brazil, Juan Simon Mamani Espinoza and Elva Viviana Rodriguez Barrancos from Bolivia.

And finally, a special “thank you” to the representatives from NORAD who have been with us during all these Forum conferences with their scholarly and financial support.