

Indigenous Peoples outraged at removal of rights in REDD outcome

Poznan 11 Dec (TWN) -- In the final day of negotiations over proposed decision text for REDD under SBSTA, deep divisions arose over proposed language to ensure the protection of indigenous peoples and local communities. The United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand opposed the inclusion of any language recognizing the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities as well as any references to other relevant international standards, including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The specific recognition of indigenous peoples rights was strongly supported by many including Bolivia, the European Union, Norway, Mexico, Switzerland and others. The final draft text only noted the importance of indigenous peoples' participation.

Outraged that the word "rights" was removed from the text, several indigenous peoples groups, and joined by several other allied human rights and environmental organizations, protested in the conference corridors shouting "No rights, No REDD." Marcial Arias Garcia, from Panama and the International Alliance of Indigenous-Tribal People of the World, said "The indigenous people are profoundly concerned as our basic rights have been violated."

At a press conference on 10 December, which is international human rights day, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, chair of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues (and director of TEBTEBBA), said it was sad that on the 60th Anniversary of the adoption of the UN Declaration on Human Rights, some States have denied indigenous peoples of their rights at the UNFCCC.

She said that indigenous peoples were shocked to see the final version of the Draft Conclusions on REDD (at the SBSTA) had removed any references to rights of indigenous peoples and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

She added this move was spearheaded by the same States (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA) which voted against the adoption of the UNDRIP by the UN General Assembly last 13 Sept. 2008.

Furthermore, these same states used the phrase "indigenous people" instead of "indigenous peoples" with an "s" which is the internationally accepted language. The international human rights instrument on indigenous peoples' rights, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was adopted by 144 member-states of the UN, uses Indigenous Peoples. This was a battle fought by indigenous peoples for more than 30 years within the UN. The "s" in peoples means that indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination (Article 3, UNDRIP) and have collective rights. The UNDRIP is an interpretation of how the existing Human Rights Covenants apply to indigenous peoples considering the historical and present injustices they are suffering from.

Witnessing the way indigenous peoples rights are undermined by the very States who took the lead in formulating and adopting the UN Declaration on Human Rights, 60 years ago, is a tragic thing, said Tauli-Corpuz. "These States are very keen to include REDD as part of the agreement on mitigation which will be agreed in Copenhagen in

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2009. However, they obstinately refuse to recognize the rights of indigenous peoples and other forest peoples, who are the ones who sacrificed life and limb to keep the world's remaining tropical and sub-tropical rainforests.”

Tauli-Corpuz called upon these States to reconsider their positions and move towards recognizing indigenous peoples' rights, as contained in the UNDRIP, as a framework for the design and implementation of REDD.

“I earnestly wish to see States and the UN system implement effectively the UNDRIP as stated in Article 42. The Declaration has to be implemented in all arenas, whether at the local and national level and at the global level, including by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and its protocols,” she said.

She also congratulated the Parties who insisted that the language of rights and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples remain in the draft conclusions. “I know they fought hard for these and I certainly hope they will continue to do this in the future negotiations.”

Indigenous peoples will continue to oppose the REDD mechanisms if their rights are not recognized by States and the UN, including the UNFCCC and the World Bank, she added. “They are very vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change, but they are also providing the solutions to climate change. Their traditional knowledge on forests and biodiversity is crucial for the methodological issues being tackled under REDD. Their participation in designing,

implementing, monitoring and evaluating REDD policies and proposals has to be ensured. Their free, prior and informed consent has to be obtained before any REDD mechanism is put into place in their territories. It is their right to decide whether to accept REDD or not.”

She also welcomed paragraph 6 of the Decision which calls for an Expert meeting on REDD before the 30th SBSTA session. This Expert meeting should be used to go more deeply into the methodological issues relevant for indigenous peoples. However, it should also be linked with the policy issues which will be discussed under AWG-LCA. Enhanced policies and measures for REDD should be linked with methodologies proposed by the SBSTA.

She also stressed the imperative for the Annex 1 countries to carry the heavier burden of mitigating climate change. “Meeting their legally binding targets for reducing their greenhouse gas emission is the main path towards mitigation. REDD, if properly designed and implemented can still contribute to mitigation. However, I believe that forests should not be used as carbon offsets for Annex 1 countries. Thus, emissions trading of forest carbon may not be the right approach. Rewards, both monetary and non-monetary, to indigenous peoples and other forest peoples for protecting the forests maybe a better track to take. Let it not be said that the richest and most powerful reneged on their duty to save this world and to respect the rights of those who have contributed the most to mitigating climate change.”