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Mobile Indigenous Peoples Participation at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues May 15 -26, 2006

The Standing Committee for the Dana Declaration in cooperation with the World Alliance for Mobile Indigenous Peoples (WAMIP) has sponsored sponsoring 20 representatives of mobile indigenous peoples and five support staff and translators to the Fifth United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) which took place in New York between May 15-26, 2006 ([click here for summary report](#)). Thanks to the generosity of a number of funders, the Standing Committee of the Dana Declaration and the Steering Committee of WAMIP were able to organize a 'side event' during the UNPFII which was moderated by a member of the Secretariat of the UNPFII. This side event was a unique opportunity to introduce members of the UNPFII and others to the special needs and vulnerabilities of mobile peoples globally – in both tropical forest areas as well as desert and tundra - in the context of the broader Indigenous Peoples Movement ([click here for report on Mobility, Livelihoods](#)).

Furthermore, the Dana Declaration Standing Committee and the Secretariat of WAMIP organized a capacity-building workshop for the 22 of the representatives of mobile indigenous peoples present at the UNPFII. The workshop was facilitated by a senior member of INTRAC and helped develop and build the capacity of mobile peoples to successfully represent themselves regionally and internationally in the context of human rights and biodiversity conservation ([click here for workshop report](#)). This effort was one further step in reducing the invisibility and marginality of mobile indigenous peoples.

Background

Mobile indigenous peoples (e.g. pastoralists, hunter-gatherers, some swidden agriculturalists) have sustainably managed the land they live on for centuries. However, some have been displaced, dispossessed and expelled from their traditional territories and left destitute and culturally impoverished, often in the name of biodiversity conservation. While these practices have been largely discarded in rhetoric by biodiversity conservation agencies, progress in human rights observance and land restitution has lagged behind new thinking on the relationship between people and protected areas. Thus, national policy and institutional change in the field have not kept pace with advances in thinking at the international level; nor do they always live up to public declarations of concern for human rights of indigenous peoples.

The Refugee Studies Centre, Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford, has worked with other bodies to address the concerns of both the welfare of mobile indigenous peoples and of biodiversity conservation. A key product was the Dana Declaration on

Conservation and Mobile Peoples (www.danadeclaration.org), with guidelines for a complementary strategy for both conservation and meeting human needs (see annex). The Dana Declaration has been endorsed by the World Parks Congress, Durban 2003 as well as noted at the World Conservation Congress, Bangkok, 2004. Participating in the 5th UNPFII is further step in raising awareness of the special vulnerabilities and needs of mobile indigenous peoples, as well as developing and building their capacity of self-representation through the World Alliance of Mobile Indigenous Peoples –WAMIP (www.iucn.org/themes/ceesp/WAMIP) and others similar groups.

Context

The opening years of the 21st century has seen a major biodiversity conservation goal achieved in the past few decades - the setting aside of large areas of the earth's surface to protect its biodiversity. Some 11.7% of the earth's land surface is in some kind of protected area, although in many of these places indigenous and traditional peoples are also found (UNEP-WCMC, 2003). In Africa alone, 7 countries now claim protected status for more than 10 % of their land base (Geisler, 2002). In the drive to establish reserves and parklands for the protection of habitat and to prevent species loss, many traditional and indigenous peoples throughout the world have suffered limitations on resource use, land expropriation and even expulsion at the hands of national and international agencies. While these practices have been largely disowned in the pronouncements of conservation agencies (see for example the Durban Accord adopted at the World Parks Congress in 2003), progress in land restitution and human rights observance is sometimes sluggish or non-existent, particularly where the indigenous peoples concerned are mobile, widely dispersed, and not physically present at all times of the year.

In many quarters, approaches to biodiversity protection have been re-examined, with a better understanding of the forces which cause environmental damage as well as the underlying assumptions concerning peoples' exclusion from protected areas (Chatty and Colchester, 2002). The beginning of the 21st century has been marked by particularly intense concern with both peoples' impact on the natural environment and the contribution that indigenous and local communities can and often do make to conservation (Rio Declaration, Article 22; Convention on Biological Diversity, Articles 8j and 10c; Resolutions on Indigenous peoples, IUCN General Assembly 1996; Beltran, IUCN and WWF, 2000; and the Durban Accord and Durban Action Plan: IUCN, 2004). This nuanced recognition of the special knowledge, roles and rights of such peoples has resulted in increasing efforts to integrate indigenous and local communities into planning and management of conservation areas or, at the very least, ameliorating the impact that such schemes have on their long-term sustainable livelihoods (Borrini-Feyerabend et al, 2004). When indigenous peoples are sedentary and relatively organized due, in part, to the density of their habitation patterns, developing and building capacity to take part in conservation-based negotiations are normally straight-forward. However when indigenous peoples are mobile, then standard sedentarist efforts to reach them often fail.

Mobile peoples are a subset of traditional and indigenous peoples whose livelihoods depend upon extensive common property use¹ of natural resources and whose mobility is

¹ Common property systems have well established community rules for use/ownership. They are not the same as open access and include such land use types as seasonal grazing, community conserved areas, etc.

both a management strategy for sustainable land use and conservation and a distinctive source of cultural identity. In some parts of the world, such as in Latin America, mobile indigenous peoples do have an organized presence within the Indigenous Peoples Movement. In many other parts of the world, however, such as Africa, the Middle East, Central and South Asia, Australia, and the Pacific, they remain largely excluded and peripheral to the main Indigenous Peoples-Biodiversity Conservation dialogue.

Mobile peoples, be they pastoralists, hunters and gatherers, far-ranging swidden agriculturalists or other similar groups, are marginalized by their very mobility. The requirement to be widely dispersed and spread out over extensive territory makes them largely invisible in their natural habitats but also marginalizes them, in particular when they are forced to settle on the edges of their former territories, be it desert, savannah or forest. The removal of mobile indigenous peoples from their traditional lands often goes unrecognized because there is no organized protest, outcry or interest group advocating their right to remain both mobile and within the borders of their traditional lands. This is the case even when their land management practices are such that the lands that they occupy are considered to be of high biodiversity value and meriting conservation. Furthermore, the special knowledge that mobile indigenous peoples have about their environment and the special role that their mobility plays in the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources often go unstudied and unrecorded. There is therefore an urgent requirement for an initiative looking specifically to raise awareness of the special vulnerabilities and needs of **mobile** indigenous peoples, as well as to develop and build capacity among mobile indigenous peoples to represent themselves and advocate their rightful place within the broader Indigenous Peoples Movement. One aim of such an initiative would be to slow down, and perhaps eventually stop, the displacement and dislocation of mobile indigenous peoples mainly resulting from biodiversity conservation areas; and to move in the direction of restoration of mobility and restoration of land rights held in common. Taking a global perspective and targeting the arid and semi-arid zones of the world along with tundra regions, forest and other eco-regions, this initiative combines a two-pronged strategy to develop and build capacity among mobile indigenous peoples as well as raise awareness of their special needs within the general Indigenous Peoples Movement

The Standing Committee for the Dana Declaration has begun to move in the direction outlined above. It has disseminated the Dana Declaration widely through a specially established website and arranged a very effective presence at the World Parks Congress in 2003 in Durban, South Africa, where the Declaration was endorsed in the WPC Workshop Recommendation 5.27. It supported the attendance of a number of representatives of mobile indigenous peoples at the Congress and encouraged their participation in the Indigenous Peoples' Caucus at the Peoples Park – a parallel event in Durban. It encouraged the formation of the WAMIP at these meetings and it worked to see the Dana Declaration endorsed at the 3rd IUCN World Conservation Congress in Bangkok (November 2004) in WCC Resolution 3.018 on mobile indigenous peoples and conservation (see www.danadeclaration.org/index.main.html). The Standing Committee for the Dana Declaration also supported six representatives of mobile indigenous peoples from Namibia, Tanzania, Jordan and Syria to attend the Pre-Congress Indigenous Peoples' workshop as well as the IUCN programme and to become familiar with the work of WAMIP and other indigenous peoples organizations.

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