



## Indigenous Peoples in the Pacific Region

*Issues related to indigenous peoples in the Pacific region will be the focus of a half-day discussion on 23 April as part of the Seventh Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, to be held at UN Headquarters in New York from 21 April to 2 May 2008. The discussion is expected to focus on the following themes:*


### ❖ Climate change and the Pacific

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that the global average sea level will rise by 7.2 to 23.6 inches (18-59 cm or 0.18- 0.59m) during this century. Much of the Pacific region is comprised of small island states, the traditional lands of many indigenous peoples. However, the very existence of many of these territories is under threat due to rising sea levels caused by climate change. Soil erosion from destructive wave activity, frequent storm surges and landslides is resulting in land loss to many indigenous communities. As such, an integral part of the culture, heritage and traditions of Pacific indigenous peoples is in jeopardy.
- Kiribati and a number of other small Pacific island nations could disappear during this century. High tides and stormy seas have also caused problems recently in the Marshall Islands, Cook Island, Tuvalu and low-lying islands of Papua New Guinea.
- Plantations and livestock - the major sources of subsistence living for indigenous communities - are now faced with serious threats from new diseases and pests linked to flooding, droughts and other climatic variations.
- Climate change and climate variability in the Pacific has led to unreliable water availability which carries serious consequences for indigenous peoples. For instance, Australia is experiencing the worst drought in 100 years, despite flooding that has occurred over the past few months. In other parts of the Pacific, indigenous peoples rely on unpredictable and untreated river water sources owing to a lack of water storage systems.
- Warmer sea temperatures have led to the bleaching of the Pacific Island's main source of survival – the coral reefs. Consequently, the biodiversity surrounding the reefs is likely to be impacted, with conditions possibly becoming critical for the local fish population.

### ❖ Migration

- Migration will become a major issue in the Pacific region as flooding is forcing families to move from their homes. Other reasons for leaving indigenous communities include land dispossession, poverty, lack of adequate water supplies, the deterioration of traditional livelihoods and lack of employment opportunities.
- Often facing limited access to information on migration options, or owing to sudden displacement, Pacific indigenous peoples may be more vulnerable to irregular migration such as human trafficking and smuggling.
- Many indigenous peoples opt for temporary or circular migration to generate supplementary income through remittances. However, as environmental degradation continues, indigenous peoples may be faced with permanent migration due to the loss of their territories.



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- Today, 84 percent of Māori live in urban areas. Most are in the main metropolitan centres: a quarter live in the region, of Auckland, New Zealand's largest city. The urban migration of Māori has been described as one of the most rapid movements of any population.
  - The family separations caused by migration may have a devastating impact on indigenous peoples in the region both for the family member who migrates and the communities of origin, with parents often forced to leave behind a child and spouse.

#### ❖ **Urbanization**

- With no viable economic alternatives, indigenous peoples move to urban settings in search of job opportunities and economic security, often with the aim of supporting their home community through remittances.
- Internal migration, especially in small island states, has brought almost half of the national population to the cities and urban areas with negative environmental consequences, including a demand on local resources. External migration to cities in the larger Pacific states such as Australia and New Zealand is also on the increase.
- Indigenous peoples who migrate to urban areas in the region face discrimination owing to their indigenous identity. Vulnerable to exploitation, they often do not enjoy basic rights, being subjected to limited access to health services, inadequate housing and unemployment.

#### ❖ **Development**

- Indigenous peoples are disproportionately represented amongst the poor and extremely poor, and suffer from inadequate access to basic healthcare and education, as well as to quality, culturally-sensitive social services.
- A lack of food security poses a threat to indigenous peoples in the Pacific region. Agriculture – the main food source – is becoming increasingly vulnerable owing to heat stress on plants and salt water incursions, especially in small island states.
- Disaggregated data on development issues and indigenous peoples in the Pacific – essential for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – is insufficient or lacking entirely. Additionally, the input of indigenous peoples in the region has thus far not been adequately included in national monitoring and reporting on the MDGs.

#### ❖ **Human Rights**

- Indigenous peoples have historically been subjected to systematic violations of their basic human rights. Grave abuses of the human rights of indigenous peoples persist in the Pacific region, often resulting from prejudices and discriminatory attitudes linked to a lack of understanding of indigenous rights.
- The indigenous peoples of the Pacific continue to have human rights concerns as a result of the loss of ancestral lands and territories. Many are in danger of losing their traditional territories and thus of disappearing as distinct peoples.
- All indigenous peoples in the Pacific region are entitled to full enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the General Assembly in 2007.

#### ❖ **Additional Information**

**For more information on the Seventh Session**, please visit:

[http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/session\\_seventh.html](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/session_seventh.html)

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