

Inter-Parliamentary  
Union



Permanent Mission of  
Mexico to the United Nations



United Nations Development  
Programme



## United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

### Summary of the side-event: *Promoting inclusive parliaments: The effective participation of indigenous peoples in decision-making*

21 April 2010 - New York

During the Ninth Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, together with the United Nations Development Programme and the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations organized a side event on *Promoting inclusive parliaments: The effective participation of indigenous peoples in decision-making*.

The panel comprised three inspiring indigenous parliamentarians from Colombia, Mexico and New Zealand who shared their personal experiences and discussed the main challenges facing indigenous peoples when entering parliament and the barriers they encounter as elected representatives. The panelists were Hon. Te Ururoa Flavell (New Zealand), Hon. Ernesto Ramiro Estacio (Colombia) and Hon. Manuel Garcia Corpus (Mexico), Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi (UNDP Practice director – Democratic Governance Group) and Ms. Diane Sheinberg (UNDP - parliamentary development programme specialist.)

Based on their personal experiences and research provided by the IPU-UNDP project on Inclusive Parliaments, the panelists identified the following challenges that indigenous people often face:

- Marginalization, deprived access to education and healthcare, poverty and the risk of not achieving the Millennium Development Goals;
- Poor democratic governance, crisis prevention issues and environmental sustainability challenges;
- Unemployment, high percentage of prison population, lower labor force participation rates and lack of professional qualification;
- Lack of resources and funds to enter politics and to campaign;
- No ownership rights on the land of their ancestors;
- Lack of representation in decision-making processes in national and sub-national levels;
- Lack of information among parliamentarians about their rights.

The panelists stressed the following **entry points to improve indigenous representation in politics**:

- Working with political parties to make possible the representation of indigenous people;
- Reinforcing the dialogue and coordination between indigenous organizations to reduce geographic disparities;
- Pushing for special measures such as quotas, national laws and indigenous-sensitive constitutions in order to facilitate indigenous participation in decision-making processes;

- Dissemination of data and awareness-raising on the number of indigenous people represented, and mechanisms that ensure their inclusion in national parliaments.

The panel discussion illustrated that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions since each situation needs to be contextualized:

- One major success for the Maori in New Zealand, after having used methods ranging from their own declaration of independence, treaties, petitions and delegations to passive resistance and warfare, was the **2004 Maori campaign** which combined the following tools: right cause (self-determination,) a campaign driven by the people, a campaign addressing the right people from across the country, right branding and visibility (Maori identity, Maori values) and speaking with a united voice. Hon. Te Ururoa Flavell shared with the audience the joy of the Maori people in light of the recognition by the Government of New Zealand of the United Nations Declaration of the Indigenous Peoples, thanks largely to the advocacy of the Maori Party.
- In the case of Colombia, the **teaching of indigenous values**, such as the respect to nature and land and the right of indigenous peoples to own their land, was crucial in the creation of an **indigenous social movement** that was able to respond to issues such as the displacement of different communities, caused by narcotraffic, violence and marginalization. Through dialogue with the government, the fight for more rights and self-administration, the movement was successful in receiving some of the land back, developing a law on forest protection and obtaining the right of self-administration of the territories inhabited by indigenous peoples.
- In Mexico, the **electoral law together with the existence of dedicated quotas for indigenous peoples** is facilitating their participation; although the system is not perfect in terms of consultation with national and especially sub-national levels of decision-making processes. Change in legislation is an imperative to make the voice of the indigenous peoples heard.

### **Conclusion**

While indigenous parliamentarians have been able to reach representation in parliament through different mechanisms, panelists identified a number of means and approaches that helped create an environment which ultimately led to their active participation in decision-making processes:

- Establishment of indigenous social movements that claim their rights in society and that eventually have an impact in the state and its institutions;
- Country-wide cooperation among indigenous communities and movements;
- Seek recognition of the nation's diversity. Once this is recognized, it eventually leads to recognition of indigenous peoples rights;
- Active participation in local elections;
- Make visible their forms of political organization at the local level and seek recognition for them at the national level;
- Advocate and lobby to amend legislation;
- Registration at census time as indigenous people.

### **For more information, please visit:**

[www.agora-parl.org/node/1061](http://www.agora-parl.org/node/1061) (AGORA - the Portal for Parliamentary development)

[www.ipu.org/minorities-e/](http://www.ipu.org/minorities-e/) (IPU website)