



# INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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## **Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 12<sup>th</sup> Session**

### **Discussion on the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples [Item 6]**

#### **Statement by Miguel Bermeo Permanent Observer**

Chairperson,

The Inter-Parliamentary Union welcomes the decision of the UN General Assembly to convene a World Conference on Indigenous Peoples here in New York next year in order to share perspectives and best practices on the rights of indigenous peoples.

Let me state at the outset that the IPU recommends that the World Conference examine progress in ensuring that indigenous peoples have a say in the formulation and adoption of public policies and, in particular those that directly affect their lives and that of their communities.

It is clearly unacceptable that indigenous peoples remain among the most vulnerable members of our societies and that they continue to be excluded from decision-making that affects their lives and the future of our countries. Their right to full and equal membership of our nations must be translated into public policies that are sensitive to their situation, needs and aspirations and be accompanied with sufficient resources.

This in turn requires their participation at all levels of government and in particular in national and sub-national parliaments. The IPU develops standards for democratic parliaments and assists many of them to be truly representative, accessible, transparent, accountable and effective institutions.

Time and again, our experience demonstrate that in order to carry out their constitutional mandate of legislating and holding government to account, parliaments must be truly representative of all sectors of society.

It is important that members of their own communities represent indigenous peoples in parliament. They are often among the most vocal advocates for indigenous rights. At the same time, indigenous parliamentarians alone will only rarely have the numerical power to exercise significant influence over parliamentary work.

The protection and promotion of indigenous rights therefore requires entire parliaments to be sensitized to and engaged in indigenous issues. In a parliamentary context, inclusiveness means both that there exist indigenous members of parliament and that parliament, as an institution, include indigenous concerns in its work. And what is valid for parliaments holds equally true for political parties. They too must be inclusive.

In 2010, the IPU convened a global parliamentary conference in Chiapas, Mexico, to debate these issues. The Chiapas Declaration that emerged from that debate makes some key recommendations for ensuring effective participation of indigenous peoples in politics. Three years later we can see some progress. We believe the world conference can benefit from these experiences.

Several parliaments are today considering ways of making sure that the right to free, prior and informed consent is observed in every step leading to the adoption of legislative and administrative measures affecting indigenous peoples. Some of them have already adopted laws to this effect. We are witnessing positive developments in several Latin American countries as well as in countries in Africa and Asia.

We propose to work closely with these and other parliaments and to encourage them to take an active interest in the world conference. We will assist them to share their experiences and, to that end, take part in both the preparation of the conference and the event itself. We are convinced that these developments can serve as an inspiration to other countries that have yet to take steps to ensure that the views of indigenous peoples are taken into account when developing public policies.

We also hope that the world conference will adopt a substantive outcome document that reflects some of the lessons learned from these new experiences. The text could usefully encourage parliaments and political parties to be more inclusive both in their composition and in their agenda and working methods. The Chiapas Declaration, to which I have just referred, contains several examples of good practice that I commend for your attention.

Let me conclude my brief remarks by reiterating the IPU's commitment to work in close cooperation with and in support of this Forum, its Bureau and the General Assembly as you prepare for the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

Thank you.