



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

**65th Session of the UN General Assembly, Third Committee
Agenda item 65: Indigenous issues
United Nations, 18 October 2010**

STATEMENT by Ambassador Anda Filip, Permanent Observer

Mr. Chairman,

It is undeniable that the representation and participation of indigenous groups in public and political life carries great importance. One forum of particular relevance in this context is the national parliament, as a central institution of any democracy. Parliament not only represents the people, makes the laws and holds the government to account, but it is also the primary forum for mediating the competing interests of society.

Research carried out recently by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in close cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has shown that, while many parliaments have adopted measures to enhance the political participation of indigenous peoples, much more needs to be done to ensure an effective participation.

The recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples is an important precondition for their effective participation in public life. The task of recognizing indigenous peoples and defining their legal status ultimately rests with national parliaments.

We observe that a small, but perhaps increasing, number of parliamentarians self-identify as members of indigenous communities. Our research has tried to understand their experience as legislators. Indigenous parliamentarians have noted that a gulf can separate the procedures and culture of the parliamentary institution from the more participatory decision-making processes of indigenous communities.

An indigenous Peruvian Congresswoman, Maria Sumire, reported that "the Parliament has always been elite. It has always been run by political parties. We have had organizations but never our own political party." Her views are echoed by an indigenous Colombian Senator, Ernesto Ramiro Estacio, who described how, "in other parties, many decisions are made over lunch or coffee, among party leaders or elites. In our case, we must reach consensus with the [indigenous] communities, and they are the ones that tell us what to do. So there is more participation, as indigenous people, in decision-making. The others are more elitist. I see more strongman-style leadership in [their] policy making".

Mr. Chairman,

An IPU-UNDP survey of parliaments showed a considerable degree of understanding that the substantive interests of indigenous peoples range across a number of policy areas, for example health and education. Some of the policy areas of special interest to indigenous peoples, such as land rights or the use of indigenous languages in the public sphere, are inherently controversial and require much discussion and deliberation with majorities.

Some of the major findings point towards policy options for the consideration of parliaments and policy-makers. These include:

- Adopting laws, resolutions or motions that recognize the diversity within societies
- Engaging with mainstream political parties to promote diversity in political life
- Ensuring prior consultation with indigenous peoples when preparing legislation that impacts on their rights
- Building political alliances inside parliament to be able to advance an indigenous legislative agenda
- Providing sufficient resources for parliamentary committees on indigenous issues to be able to function effectively
- Periodically reviewing of the effectiveness of special measures such as reserved seats for indigenous peoples
- Holding government to account for the full and effective implementation of laws for indigenous peoples
- Raising awareness of indigenous issues among all parliamentarians. This also includes increasing their familiarity with work being done on indigenous issues within the United Nations system

These issues will be examined in greater detail at the upcoming International Parliamentary Conference on Parliaments, minorities and indigenous peoples, which will take place in Chiapas, Mexico, from 31 October to 3 November 2010.

Despite the challenges, indigenous participation in the work of parliaments is also bringing results. Allow me to finish by quoting Congresswoman Maria Sumire of Peru again, who said that "even though we have been trodden on, we are still alive and we want to be respected. We want them to see us as people, as nations, and recognize that we are part of the Peruvian state. At least we have gotten the issue onto the national agenda."

I thank you for your attention.