

Opening

Else Grete Broderstad, *Head of Administration, Centre for Sámi Studies, University of Tromsø*

Dear friends!

It's nice to see you, I warmly welcome you all to Tromsø and to this year's Forum Conference. Of course, I would like to extend a special welcome to those speakers who have travelled far to be here, from [South Africa](#), [the Philippines](#), and [Guatemala](#). And welcome to our domestic and local speakers as well.

It is actually the eighth year we are holding this conference, so we have concluded that this is a well-established arena and meeting place for you.

The Forum for Development Cooperation with Indigenous Peoples, funded by NORAD–The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation–is an important project. In addition to this annual conference focusing on current topics of importance for indigenous peoples, we also cooperate with main actors on development issues. One example is a meeting in Oslo held last December, where NUPI– The Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and the Forum arranged a seminar where a report on Norwegian aid to indigenous peoples was released. As the director of the Centre for Sami Studies here at the University of Tromsø, I find this form of cooperation fruitful and useful and hope that similar projects can be arranged. As you know, the Forum is housed within the Centre. Also, another NORAD-funded project, the North/South Coalition, is also found here at the Centre, which should be a vehicle for new cooperation opportunities.

The title of this year's conference is “Indigenous Peoples–Migration and Urbanisation.” In a way, it is an unconventional topic in regards to indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples are “supposed” to be located in rural territories, on the countryside, far away from the metropolis.

However, hardly any spot on this earth is unaffected by the impact of urbanisation. Even more, and characteristic of indigenous territories, there is a desire to exploit natural resources in these areas, amplifying the impacts of migration and urbanisation.

This development creates problems, but also possibilities for indigenous peoples; these are questions that will be addressed at this conference.

One way of focusing with regard to the main questions is to ask how different processes and social conditions affect the situation for indigenous peoples. What are the consequences of, for instance, economic, industrial and military driving forces? And we could add due to current reality–climatic driving forces.

Another way of focusing is to ask: How can indigenous peoples make use of a development that, in itself, has many negative impacts that cannot be stopped, only at best be delayed? The point is also to ask how indigenous peoples themselves define and initiate change, how they are actors, not passive receivers without influence. Let me just add that I underline the importance of both angles, when dealing with challenges concerning knowledge of importance for the indigenous situation.

Migration changes the demographic picture. Today almost 50% of all indigenous peoples, from what I have heard, live in cities or urban areas. This challenges our traditional understanding of indigenous cultures and livelihood. Or, as it says in the invitation to this conference: How is indigenous identity is expressed and maintained in new urban settings?

Seen from an indigenous point of view, it becomes important to underline the fact that traditions are dynamic and cultures are not frozen. People's ability to make use of technology, for example, must be regarded as having cultural vitality, not cultural loss. The latter interpretation would assume a notion of culture as “pure” and “genuine.” Indigenous rights and efforts towards

increased political influence would then become the means toward isolation in order to preserve “purity” and “genuineness.” But such a “purity-based claim” for protection of indigenous cultures would result in “no real” indigenous peoples in the end, and consequently nobody would claim indigenous rights.

This is a point I made back in 1998, together with Nils Oskal, a Sami professor, in a newspaper discussion about the protection of Sami culture. I find the same point relevant in this context, in the discussion about indigenous people living outside their traditional lands.

By these reflections, let me once more welcome you all to Tromsø, and I hope you enjoy your stay here and that you will find the conference to be interesting and useful. And before I give the floor to the Chair of the Forum Advisory Board, Professor Georges Midre, I just want to thank the advisory board for their involvement. We do appreciate your work, and I also want to thank the Centre’s own Terje Lilleeng who has the day-to-day responsibility for the Forum. I am pleased to declare the 2007 Forum Conference open!

Opening

Georges Midré, Forum for Development Cooperation with Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous Peoples Migration and Urbanisation

On behalf of the Forum Conference Board I wish you all welcome to the eighth conference convened by the Forum for Development Cooperation with Indigenous Peoples. This year’s conference will focus on indigenous peoples and aspects of migration and urbanisation. We have asked for papers that will trace the reasons for migration, and we wish also to focus on urban living conditions and the basis for social and political organisation.

This is not a new issue. There are a number of monographs and other publications discussing the topic. To mention one example: IWGIA, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, published an issue in 2002 with the title *Indigenous Peoples in Urban Areas*, exclusively dedicated to the theme we will discuss during this conference.

There seems to be a growing interest in these issues since a large and increasing part of the world’s indigenous population today lives in urban areas. But among the indigenous organizations—as well as among the foreign development organizations—the dominant problem is that the definition of indigenous has been tightly linked to traditional land use, apparently overlooking some consequences of conditions that drive indigenous people towards the cities. This may be understandable due to the fact that for centuries the most central issue for the indigenous struggle has its origin in their close ties to the land and the quest for control over traditional territories.

However, it is necessary to break with the conceptual configuration that is commonly found when the situation of indigenous populations is discussed, that is, the apparently unbreakable link between poverty, small-scale agriculture, and indigeness. I can see two main reasons for this. One reason has already been mentioned and has to do with the number of people now living in the cities. A large proportion of the indigenous peoples of the world are living on what their land has to offer, and with that they are poor. But an increasing number are living in urban areas. They struggle for survival outside their traditional rural areas and they derive their means of livelihood from sources other than customary land use. According to some estimates, the urban indigenous population amounts to half of the global indigenous population, and that number is increasing. The other main reason for the increased interest in the situation of the urban indigenous population is that although much of the migration to urban centres is caused by rural poverty and other “push factors,” the overall picture now seems to be more complex. It is true that reasons for migration may range from poverty to forced eviction. But we should also take into account that the city offers some pull factors, promises of better lives, including

valued services such as access to education, health services and new economic opportunities that are not available in the rural districts. The Mayan social anthropologist Irma Alicia Velázquez Nimatuj describes the rise of an indigenous business class in Guatemala. The book published by IWGIA mentions skilled and prosperous traders in Ecuador and expert Mohawk steelworkers in the US. There are a number of similar examples from other parts of the world, and it seems important to analyze these avenues and mechanisms leading out of extreme poverty and into more prosperous lives.

Culture is not an unchanging artefact, and identities may develop and transform during ones lifetime following new experiences and living in changing environments. Since indigenous identity is so strongly linked to land and nature, a central question will be to understand how these identities may be formed, expressed and maintained in the new urban settings. The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues debated the situation of urban indigenous peoples and migration earlier this year. In his opening statement to the conference the Cree Canadian lawyer Willie Littlechild underlined that urbanisation processes are linked to both push and pull factors. He also emphasized the importance of identity issues, and particularly that living in cities does not necessarily imply weakening or loss of identity. On the contrary, alternative sources of identity building and maintenance do exist, and it is vital to identify and support these processes.

In the case of the Sami, the social scientist Lina Gaski discusses how the idea of land is integrated into the definition of “Sami culture” and thereby to the identity of the Sami. *To protect and preserve the natural resources, Gaski writes, are seen as absolute conditions if Sami culture is to be maintained and developed, and the link between the Sami population, culture and territory has therefore been essential for constructing nationhood.* Gaski describes how the political discourse in the Sami parliament employs imagery of society – nature. This is also expressed in official documents from the Sami Parliament. The Plan for the period 2002-2005 states: *The Sami culture is closely related to nature, both spiritually and practically and large parts of the Sami value foundations are attached to a life close to nature* (2002: 4). (Gaski 2007, forthcoming). One might ask how these cultural identities are expressed in the urban setting, for the many Sami living in the national capital of Oslo, or in urban centres like Tromsø. One could also ask if the ethno-political discourse as presented by the Sami Parliament is less relevant for the urban Sami.

In the publication from IWGIA I mentioned earlier, the editors Jens Dahl and Marianne Jensen discuss how the migrants to the cities leave social networks and often find themselves unprotected in the new, urban environments; nor will they necessarily be included in the more formal social movements and labour unions found in the cities. An illustrating case is presented by Juliana Turquí in her Master’s thesis from the University of Tromsø. She shows how Mayas working in the municipal markets in Guatemala City are seen neither as workers by the labour unions, nor as Mayas by the Mayan movement. The former defines the worker’s demands as “ethnic” and thereby as an issue for the indigenous organizations, and not as a “labour issue.” The Mayan movement, on the other hand, still gives priority to the rural indigenous population, and not to the urban workers of Mayan descent. These workers are marginalized in relation to both kinds of potentially protective networks and organizations. The formation and inclusion in formal as well as informal social networks and movements seems to be vital when indigenous people are struggling to protect their social and economic rights, an issue that should be addressed in Guatemala and elsewhere.

During the month of March of this year the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-HABITAT) set up a meeting of International experts in Santiago de Chile. One important point from the summary of that meeting is well worth mentioning here; the experts concluded that the urban indigenous populations may well have multiple identities. They concluded:

Public authorities need to understand the multiple identities of indigenous peoples within urban areas and their continuing relationship to their traditional lands and natural resources. Indigenous peoples should not be seen as divided between urban and rural, but rather as peoples with rights and a common cultural identity, as well as facing similar challenges in adapting to changing circumstances and environments.

Again, it is a pleasure to welcome you to the conference and in particular those of you who have travelled far to be here, Geraldine Doco from the Cordillera Peoples Alliance in the Philippines, Jean Burgess, representing the Ghonaqua Khoe Khoe Peoples, Cape Town and Priscilla de Wet and Petro Esterhuysen from the University of the Free State in South Africa. We also appreciate the participation of Rune Paulsen representing the Rainforest Foundation, Norway, and Siv Øvernes from the University of Tromsø, also a member of the Forum Board.

Tomorrow we will draw on experiences from Guatemala presented by Lily Muñoz and Tomás López, from the University college of Bodø. Bjørg Evjen from the University of Tromsø will discuss some aspects of the Sami experience under the pressure of industrialization in Northern Norway.

As usual we have invited shorter presentations under the heading of Forum Update. We look forward to listen to Mattias Åhrén from the Sami Council, Rune Paulsen from the Rainforest Foundation and Simon Rye from NORAD.

Finally Jennifer Hayes from UiTø and Jens Dahl from IWGIA will sum up the conference.

A special “thank you” to the representatives from NORAD who have been with us during all these Forum conferences with their scholarly presentations and financial support.