

**Joint Statement by Kuru Family of Organisations, Letloa, Trust for Okavango Cultural and Development Initiative (TOCADI), and Komku Trust of Botswana to the
Sixth Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

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Statement read by Ms. Tlhokomelang Ngaka, email:ngakatlhoko@yahoo.ca

Discussion item 4: Implementation on the six mandate areas and on Millennium Development Goals

My name is Tlhokomelang Ngaka, I come from Botswana. I am very thankful for this opportunity as a young San woman to participate in this forum for the first time, as a partner of the International Land Coalition. I am privileged to be the first San woman to have a national diploma in nature conservation.

I work for a San network called Letloa, which supports San community-based organisations in southern Africa. Where I come from, we have not been aware that other indigenous people face the same challenges that we do. This is an important experience for me to meet indigenous people from around the globe.

Since our country gained independence in 1966, we have been faced with many difficulties. We have lost our land, which is also making us lose our culture and knowledge. We now live on the edge of other people's villages, and we are susceptible to diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Many of our children are orphans. 26% of the people in my village are HIV positive. The organisation I work for, Letloa, is training young San Community Health Workers to give information about HIV/AIDS in our own language.

Our government provides free Anti-Retro Viral drugs, but many San cannot access them easily. Health, education and government officials do not speak our languages. Our indigenous languages are not recognised by our Government.

Though education is free in our country, San people do not succeed to a higher level, due to the reason that our languages are not used and our cultures and identity are not recognised in the education system. Children leave school at an early age. Parents cannot even speak with the teachers. We are setting up early primary schools that will use our mother tongue, but also prepare children to speak the national language. We are developing this in collaboration with San language committees in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa.

Letloa encourages us to promote our culture through dancing and games that we used to play. It also gives young people a chance to participate so that we do not lose all of our culture.

We have suffered a lot of discrimination and marginalisation in Botswana. The current system of rural government does not include the San people. Only Bantu dominant peoples can be chiefs. Our traditional land use is not recognised, only cattle herding, ranching or some forms of tourism.

We are optimistic that there are new things going on in Botswana. We believe that our Government is learning a lot from the UN system. Our government is recognising now that traditional knowledge of biodiversity is an important national resources. Our Deputy President is interested in new partnerships between rural communities and nature conservation. Botswana has recently adopted new legislation on Community Based Natural Resources Management which is in line with the UN Convention on Biological Diversity – including Article 8J on traditional knowledge. We value this new approach from our Government.

However, we also repeat that our people are extremely vulnerable. Many have been displaced and continue to live in poverty in what is one of the wealthiest countries in Africa. Recently our High Court ruled that the Government was wrong in forcibly removing people from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve.

We recommend to the UNPFII that:

- There needs to be more dialogue between UNDP, UNEP and CBD with the Republic of Botswana on how to nurture and promote traditional knowledge and its application to the protection of biological diversity;
- We encourage the FAO to recognise that wild food is an important African food source and to dialogue with our Department of Agriculture to review our mapping projects in Ngamiland;
- There needs to be closer dialogue between UNESCO and the Republic of Botswana on intercultural dialogue and the protection and promotion of intangible heritage;
- We ask the UNPFII to study the IPACC report on hunter-gatherers and traditional knowledge which promotes ways for the State to recognise and value traditional knowledge of tracking and biodiversity, and to link this to new technologies
- We ask WHO and UNAIDS to contact us about approaches to improving equitable access to treatment of HIV / AIDS;
- Finally, we encourage the inter-agency support group, the Permanent Forum and the SADC states to dialogue with the International Land Committee on sustainable approaches to land tenure and conflict management.