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UN conference for civil society hears calls for greater support for marginalized groups



UN marks International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples in 9 August 2010

31 August 2010 – Marginalized groups such as indigenous communities deserve special attention from policy-makers if the world is to achieve the social and economic targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (**MDGs**), the annual United Nations conference with civil society groups heard today.

Speakers told the 63rd UN Department of Public Information (**DPI**)/Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Conference in Melbourne, Australia, of the need to overturn entrenched disparities in health and life expectancy between rich and poor countries and between the well-off in some societies and marginalized

groups.

Governments had an international obligation to improve the health and well-being of marginalized groups, said Jane Freemantle, a paediatric epidemiologist who works with Australian indigenous communities.

Ms. Freemantle told a round-table discussion on the second day of the three-day event that one of the first steps to changing the situation would be to collect more accurate and complete data on vulnerable groups.

All too often, she said, there is not enough detailed data on the health of indigenous communities, hampering the ability of health-care workers to make the right interventions to improve the situation.

Thelma Narayan, who heads a centre for community health in Bangalore, India, said both the collection and the use of data was critical, and she stressed also that marginalized groups should play a much greater role in obtaining data about their own members' health.

Ms. Narayan noted that in India the release of data showing that as many as 40 per cent of children under the age of five were under-nourished had triggered a push for social and political action on the issue.

The theme of this year's DPI-NGO conference is improving global health, especially in connection with the MDGs, which include several health targets, such as reducing the mortality rate for children under the age of five by two thirds; slashing maternal mortality rates; achieving universal access to reproductive health; and halting the spread of HIV/AIDS.

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