

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

UN Headquarters, New York, 9-20 May 2016

Background

Globally, there are an estimated **370 million persons** belonging to indigenous peoples, living across **90 countries**. They make up **5% of the world's population, but account for 15% of the poorest**. They **speak an overwhelming majority of the world's estimated 7,000 languages and represent 5,000 different cultures**.

The Permanent Forum is comprised of 16 independent experts, functioning in their personal capacity. ECOSOC appoints the members, 8 of whom are nominated by governments and 8 by indigenous organizations from the different part of the world.

This year's session : The issues of peace and conflict, often related to indigenous peoples' lands, territories and resources and to their rights and distinct identities were at the forefront of the discussions.

Two interactive panels on 17 May on the special theme « Indigenous peoples : conflict, peace and resolution » identified strategies and concrete measures to prevent conflict and secure peace. They also highlighted indigenous participation in peace processes, the contribution of indigenous women, the importance of access to justice and traditional institutions, and the role of indigenous peoples in preventing conflict and securing a just and durable peace ;

The Permanent Forum also deliberated on issues related to indigenous youth, health, education, languages, human rights, economic and social development, environment and culture, as well as the follow-up to the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and how it relates to indigenous peoples, featured prominently in the discussions on 18 May.

As in the past, there were dialogues with the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Chair of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the two other UN mechanisms, in addition to the Permanent Forum, specific to indigenous peoples.

Eighty side events, more than ever before, took place during the 2 weeks session, organized by indigenous peoples' organizations, UN member States, UN entities, other intergovernmental organizations, NGOs and other stakeholders.

A cultural event with performances by Sara Curruchich, a Maya singer from Guatemala and SlinCraze, a Sami rap artist from Norway, took place on Tuesday, 10 May .

Closing its 15th session, the Forum sent a series of far-reaching recommendations, on issues ranging from the preservation of indigenous languages to the prevention of suicide among indigenous youth, to the ECOSOC :

- i) By its report on the international expert group meeting on the theme of indigenous languages, the Forum, noting that more than half of the world's indigenous languages would become extinct by 2100, recommended that States recognize the language rights of indigenous peoples and develop policies to

promote and protect indigenous languages, including by supporting full immersion methods. It further recommended that States and the United Nations system provide support, including funding, for the efforts of indigenous peoples' institutions to preserve and revitalize their languages, and that the General Assembly proclaim an International Year of Indigenous Languages by 2020.

- ii) According to the report on implementation of the Forum's 6 mandated areas, the Forum welcomed Canada's recent endorsement of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Regarding a proposal to place an observatory on Hawaii's sacred mountain Mauna Kea, it recommended that the free, prior and informed consent of native Hawaiians be recognized.
- iii) Further by that report, the Forum urged the consideration of a distinct United Nations voluntary fund for indigenous youth, or the earmarking of existing and future funds for that purpose. It further urged States to take the measures necessary for the prevention of self-harm and suicide among indigenous children and young people, recommending that States adopt measures to address the specific problems of police brutality, systemic police violence and discrimination against indigenous women.
- iv) In its report on the theme of this year's session « Indigenous peoples : conflict, peace and resolution », the Forum recommended that States take effective measures to eliminate violence against indigenous peoples, including by studying the root causes of conflict and human rights abuses, developing indicators and methodologies for risk assessment and early warning mechanisms.
- v) More specifically, the Forum urged the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to investigate the assassination of Berta Caceres in Honduras. Condemning the unresolved disappearance of 43 trainee teachers in Guerrero, Mexico, it called upon the Government of that country to resolve that disappearance. It further invited Burundi, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Mali, Nigeria and Rwanda to submit reports on the situation of indigenous peoples affected by conflict in those countries to the forum at its 16th session.
- vi) By its report on follow-up to its recommendations, the Forum noted that indigenous peoples, including the Canada's Ktunxa Nation, Australia's Aboriginal people and Guatemala's Mayan people, continued to face destruction of their religious, spiritual and cultural sites, and urged States to take effective measures to ensure the protection of such sites.

The Forum sent 3 draft decisions on its future work, to the ECOSOC, the first of which would have it decide to organize a 3-day international expert group meeting under the theme « Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples : the role of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and other indigenous-specific mechanisms »

By the term of draft decision II, the ECOSOC would decide to hold the Forum's 16th session from 24 April to 5 May 2017 at United Nations Headquarters

By draft decision III, it would take note of the report of the Permanent Forum at its 15th session, and approve a provisional agenda for its next session, with a focus on indigenous human rights defenders and indigenous youth .

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