

International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples 9 August 2015

Statement of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz

As we celebrate the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples this 9th of August 2015, we look back into what has been achieved the past years and envisage what can be done for the future. Barely a year ago, the UN General Assembly convened the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples and adopted an Outcome Document by consensus.

As the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples I take seriously the commitments made by the States contained in the Outcome Document. Paragraph 7 where governments said, "We commit ourselves to taking, in consultation and cooperation with indigenous peoples, appropriate measures at the national level, including legislative, policy and administrative measures, to achieve the ends of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and to promote awareness of it among all sectors of society, including members of legislatures, the judiciary and the civil service." States should demonstrate political will and seriousness in the implementation of their commitments and their human rights obligations.

Almost 7 years have passed since the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted also by the UN General Assembly. Indigenous peoples demand that the Declaration and the WCIP Outcome Document be fully implemented. In my capacity as the Special Rapporteur, I continue to receive many reports from indigenous peoples on how their rights, enshrined in the UN Declaration and ILO Convention No. 169 are still blatantly violated not only by states but increasingly by private actors like corporations.

The assertion of indigenous peoples of their rights and their resistance against incursions into their lands by extractive industries and land grabbers has strengthened. However, systematic violation of their rights ranging from arbitrary arrests, the labeling of indigenous organizations, leaders and activists as terrorist organizations as terrorists, and torture and extrajudicial killings of indigenous peoples continues. Their lack of access to basic social services and the violation of their cultural rights remain appalling. Violence against indigenous women is still pervasive in many countries. Reports show a high representation in jails of indigenous women in countries like Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand and in these same countries, missing and murdered indigenous women is a stark reality. Many indigenous children are not able to finish primary school and indigenous women's access to health care services is still limited. All these will undercut the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals which will soon be adopted.

Increasing foreign investments coming into many countries further exacerbate the loss of lands and resources of indigenous peoples and significant environmental destruction of their territories. Violations of the rights of indigenous peoples are worsening because

of the continuing implementation of neoliberalism and extractivism as well as increasing foreign investments agreed upon in more than 2,700 state-to-state bilateral investment treaties (BITs). Indigenous peoples' right and capacity to pursue their own economic, social and cultural development is still very much challenged.

Where lies the hope for indigenous peoples? There is an increasing number of indigenous communities, organizations, institutions and networks which are strengthening their capacities to compel States and corporations to implement the UN Declaration and ILO Convention No. 169. Such efforts include awareness raising on their rights; designing and implementing their own development paths; doing community participatory mapping and resource inventories and developing and using participatory monitoring tools to measure the extent of implementation of the legal instruments and the agreed Sustainable Development Goals; using and transmitting traditional knowledge systems; waging campaigns on various issues and strengthening their own movements at all levels.

I urge indigenous peoples to multiply several times over these efforts. They should use more effectively relevant legal instruments and engage actively with the UN mechanisms on indigenous peoples. These include the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and my mandate, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

I urge States to meaningfully implement the UN Declaration and the ILO Convention No. 169 and the commitments they made in the WCIP Outcome Document. A substantial decrease in violations of the rights of indigenous peoples will lead towards more peaceful indigenous communities and better chances of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Indigenous peoples should be regarded as allies and partners of States and the UN as well as other multilateral bodies in addressing climate change, stopping the erosion of biodiversity, enhancing cultural diversity and achieving the SDGs. The contributions of indigenous peoples in addressing the global ecological and cultural crises cannot and should not be underestimated.

I urge the UN bodies, agencies, programs and funds to implement the UN Declaration and their own policies or guidelines on how they will work with indigenous peoples. Coherence and complementation amongst you all in implementing the Declaration and developing and implementing a System-wide Action Plan on indigenous peoples should be enhanced. The human-rights based approach to development and the UNDG Guidelines on Indigenous Issues should guide you in all the work you do with indigenous peoples. I also urge corporations to adhere to the Guidelines on Business and Human Rights and their own guidelines on free, prior and informed consent.

Let us all celebrate the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples by demonstrating our collective political will to address the serious implementation gap in relation to the UN Declaration and the ILO Convention No. 169. Long live the indigenous peoples all over the world!

The Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, **Victoria Tauli-Corpuz** (Philippines), is a human rights activist working on indigenous peoples' rights. Her work for more than three decades has been focused on movement building among indigenous peoples and also among women, and she has worked as an educator-trainer on human rights, development and indigenous peoples in various contexts. She is a member of the Kankana-ey, Igorot indigenous peoples in the Cordillera Region in the Philippines. As Special Rapporteur, she is independent from any government or organization and serves in his individual capacity. Learn more, log on to:

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