



THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

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Press release

UN Forum calls for measures to advance indigenous peoples' collective rights to lands, territories and resources

United Nations, 27 April 2018 -- The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues concluded its 17th session today with the adoption of recommendations to protect and advance indigenous peoples' rights worldwide, stressing that indigenous peoples' collective rights to lands, territories and resources not only serve their own wellbeing but also help address some of the most pressing global challenges such as climate change and the loss of biological diversity.

"Despite some progress, indigenous peoples all over the world continue to fall behind," said Mariam Waleet Aboubakrine, the Chairperson of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. "Poverty rates are higher, access to healthcare and education is poorer for indigenous peoples than the general population," she said, adding that, "in most countries, we see a major gap in life expectancy between indigenous peoples and other groups; suicide rates are often significantly higher for indigenous peoples - and in this regard, I am particularly concerned about indigenous youth."

This year's session of the Forum focused on indigenous peoples' collective rights to lands, territories and resources, which are at the heart of indigenous peoples' struggles around the world. Indigenous peoples' relationships to their ancestral lands are the source of their cultural, spiritual and social identity; the foundation upon which their traditional knowledge systems have developed; and the cornerstone of their physical and economic well-being.

The Forum pointed out some positive developments in this regard, including the recent decision by the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights in the case of the Ogiek community in Kenya, and the recognition of indigenous peoples' collective rights to lands, territories and resources by countries including Bolivia, Canada, the Republic of Congo, Denmark, Ecuador, Indonesia, New Zealand, Norway, and the Philippines. In other countries, such as Australia, Colombia, and the United States of America, tracts of lands and/or territories have been set aside for indigenous collective control.



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But the Forum also voiced concerns about the wide gap between the formal recognition of rights and the practical implementation of laws and policies, and emphasized the need for concrete action at the national and local levels. “I call on States to make greater efforts to ensure that the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is not just a piece of paper, but a real and accurate presentation of the rights that indigenous peoples enjoy in real life,” Ms. Aboubakrine emphasized in her closing remarks.

The Forum urged States to take effective measures to halt land alienation in indigenous peoples' territories, to assist indigenous peoples in mapping the boundaries of their communal lands, and to seek the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples when involving their territories, lands and natural resources, among other recommendations.

The Forum also urged United Nations funds, agencies and programmes to incorporate recognition of indigenous peoples' collective rights to lands, territories and resources into their policies and programmes at the country level.

Indigenous lands make up around 20 per cent of the earth's territory, but contain 80 per cent of the world's remaining biodiversity – a clear sign that indigenous peoples are the most effective stewards of the environment.

The Forum emphasized that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals under the 2030 Agenda is not possible without fulfilling indigenous peoples' rights to lands, territories and resources.

More than 1,000 indigenous peoples' representatives attended the session from 16 to 27 April at UN Headquarters in New York.

The rapporteur's unedited version of the report of the 17th session will be available at www.un.org/indigenous, after it is adopted, with the official document expected in June. The report will be presented to the Economic and Social Council in July 2018.

For more information, please see www.un.org/indigenous.

Media contact:

Martina Donlon, UN Department of Public Information, donlon@un.org, +1 212 963 6816



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