



Statement by the Group of Friends of Indigenous Peoples on safeguarding the health, wellbeing, and livelihoods of indigenous peoples across the world in face of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is having serious impact on the health, wellbeing, and livelihoods of people across the world, with a disproportionate negative effect on some peoples. Indigenous peoples, who account for over 476 million people and spread across 90 countries, are among such peoples.

The Group of Friends of Indigenous Peoples are concerned over the risks faced by indigenous peoples, both in urban and rural areas, in particular over the health and wellbeing of elders, persons with underlying health conditions, persons with disabilities, women and children.

We call on Member States and on the United Nations system to protect the health and the lives of indigenous peoples, and to include the specific needs of indigenous peoples in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, guided by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as by the UNDESA considerations for governments, United Nations entities, private sector and NGOs as regards to indigenous peoples and the COVID-19 pandemic¹, and by the relevant guidance provided by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and other relevant UN bodies and agencies.

We strongly support the calls to the protection of the health and wellbeing of indigenous peoples made by the Chair of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues², the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples³, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples⁴, and the FAO⁵.

As the international community responds to the rapidly evolving COVID-19 pandemic situation, we stress the importance of providing indigenous peoples with adequate, accessible, and culturally appropriate information, including through the use of indigenous languages; of engaging and including indigenous peoples in the response measures; of ensuring access to medicines, vaccines, medical equipment⁶, and healthcare; of implementing measures to prevent, protect and mitigate the consequences of all forms of violence, especially those against indigenous women and girls, and of respecting the human rights of indigenous

¹ https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2020/04/COVID19_IP_considerations.pdf

² https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenous-peoples-es/wp-content/uploads/sites/34/2020/04/UNPFII-Chair-statement_COVID19.pdf

³ <http://unsr.vtaulicorpuz.org/site/index.php/es/entrevistas-y-prensa/322-covid19>

⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/ipeoples/emrip/pages/emripindex.aspx>

⁵ http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/faoweb/2020/Indigenous/Indigenous_Peoples_Unit_COVID-19_Statement_English.pdf

⁶ <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/74/274>

peoples. We also recommend providing, where appropriate, opportunities for indigenous-led initiatives.

We believe that equality and non-discrimination must guide COVID-19 responses, and indigenous peoples should take part in the design, implementation and evaluation of these responses. The COVID-19 crisis cannot be solved with public health and emergency measures alone; all human rights must be respected and protected.

Furthermore, we highlight that the recovery efforts should not overlook the needs nor the rights of indigenous peoples. Hard-won development gains should not be reversed, and rights must be respected. As the world recovers from the immediate health-related consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and assesses and addresses its socio-economic impacts, the international community must renew its pledge to leave no one behind.

Group of Friends of Indigenous Peoples is a multi-regional group of 20 States, which include Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Bolivia, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Dominica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Norway, New Zealand, Spain, Paraguay, and Peru.