



UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Date: 21 January 2014

Ref.: SDPD/14/01/0002/6c

Dear Mr. Hongbo,

I refer to your letter to the UNECA Executive Secretary dated 22 November 2013 with a reference number DESA-13/01435 on contribution to the thirteenth session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), which will take place, 12-23 May 2014.

The specific nature of indigenous populations as a marginalized group did not feature largely in ECA's work. ECA's work on exclusion vulnerability and marginalized groups in the African context is now gathering pace and focus as a reflection of the Commission's reform that has established a Social Development Policy Division. The research and advocacy activities that ECA is leading on the post 2015 agenda and its emphasis on inequality and inclusive growth for economic transformation has rekindled the need to raise awareness on all types of exclusion based on ethnicity that will include indigenous populations.

The institutional recognition of indigenous peoples in Africa has had a chequered history in terms of definitions as well as specific programmes and policies. In 2001, the African Union emanated a resolution on indigenous peoples thus providing a legal framework for identification and policy formulation on indigenous people on the continent.

The institutional setting seems to be misaligned with member states policies and programmes. This can be gauged by the results of an ECA led initiative of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) review. The 52 questionnaires (out of 54 countries) received by the Commission had had a dedicated section on indigenous populations. The predominance of member states has shown limited interest or non applicability of indigenous peoples within their societies (for example, Sierra Leone, Mauritius, Lesotho, Nigeria, and Malawi). The few member states that have done so include Namibia that defines the San people who number between 32,000 and 38,000 as indigenous; Kenya defines them as mainly pastoralists and hunter gathers who make up about 15 per cent of the population; and South Africa defines them as those groups that are in a "structurally subordinate position to the dominating groups" and include the San, Nama, Korana, Griqua, and Khoi. Several other countries such as Ethiopia, also reported their clusters of indigenous people.

Mr. WU Hongbo
Under-Secretary-General
Secretary General for the International Conference
On Small Island Development States
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In terms of policies, in Namibia, the Cabinet approved a Division (2010) for San Development to promote the rights of indigenous people and marginalized communities in the country. In South Africa, the White Paper on Traditional Leadership and Governance (2003) and a related Cabinet memo (2004) was approved to launch a policy process recognizing the “vulnerable” indigenous people in the country. Ethiopia adopted a Pastoralist Development Policy in 2003 and the Pastoralist Community Programme (2003-2018) and started implementing them through the Ministry of Federal Affairs, targeting pastoralists and agro-pastoralists. The most important measures undertaken by countries were: protecting the indigenous people from discrimination (11 countries); access to public education (10 countries); data collection (10 countries); instituting mechanisms for their participation in development planning (9 countries); and creating decent work (9 countries).

What emerges clearly even from the member states that acknowledge the existence of indigenous people within their societies is a variability of the definition of indigenous people, notwithstanding the African Union resolution. They normally advocate for their rights by focusing on four human rights issues: legal recognition; equality and non-discrimination; culture and language; and land and resource rights. However the redefinition of the MDG development agenda and the construction of the post 2015 development agenda have provided a unique forum for African countries to present a common front on the way forward. The need for a more inclusive sustainable growth path has brought to the fore the need to tackle marginalized groups and inequality has been a kernel of this new African agenda. Whilst not specifically referring to indigenous groups it does place human rights of all citizens at its core.

ECA has led the continental discourse and policy debate on the post 2015 agenda and has advocated for protecting minorities in its knowledge products.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Thokozile Ruzvidzo', is positioned above the printed name.

Thokozile Ruzvidzo
Officer-in-Charge

Social Development Policy Division