

UN PERMANENT FORUM INDIGENOUS ISSUES- 2021

Agenda Item 6: Thematic dialogues: Follow up to the outcome document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

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Presentation on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

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According to the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) of 2019, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the past 4 years was not on track for a single goal of the 17 SDGs. Further, there was even regression in four key elements reflected in the Goals, which are rising inequalities, worsening climate change and biodiversity loss, and increasing amounts of waste from human activity that are overwhelming capacities to process them. This worrisome scenario also reflects the realities of indigenous peoples across the globe, who are not only being left behind but also pushed behind further.

In spite of the commitments made by states to a balanced implementation of the three intertwined dimensions of the SDGs (the economic, social and environmental), the main priorities and targets are more on unsustainable economic growth in the name of “national development” in partnership with business and investors, which are hardly regulated in terms of social and environmental policies and safeguards. This is a major factor for the continuing disregard and outright violations of the collective rights of indigenous peoples across the globe, which result in widespread grabbing of indigenous peoples’ lands and resources, conflicts over resource-use and development, forced displacements or evictions, increasing poverty and hunger, destruction of cultural heritage, increased violence against women and girls. All of these areas are linked to the SDGs. It is also a major factor contributing to the worsening inequality, pollution and forest degradation, loss of biodiversity in indigenous territories as corporations and investors scramble to take control and extract the indigenous peoples remaining resources.

Goal 13 on combatting climate change is another major challenge for indigenous peoples. Mining for coal, oil and gas in indigenous territories is still a priority for a number countries. Likewise, renewable energy projects such as windmills, geothermal plants and large dams are implemented in indigenous territories without the consent of affected indigenous peoples. Adding insult to injury; the energy generated by these projects are more for urban and town centers, and not for the host indigenous communities. This skewed implementation of the just transition to combat climate change and advance the SDGs remains under the ‘business as usual approach’ instead of taking transformational actions for sustainability and equity. Deforestation for agribusiness expansion on one hand, and fortress conservation on the other hand is pushing millions of indigenous peoples further behind.

As the theme of the ongoing session of the Permanent Forum is Goal 16 relating to peace, justice and strong institutions, this Goal is in fact a central element for indigenous peoples' inclusion in the SDGs as it encompasses the respect and protection of human rights including the collective rights of indigenous peoples, peace, access to justice and good governance.

Many of the challenges mentioned above pertains to Goal 16 which also has the most number of recommendations in the Human Rights system of the UN relating to indigenous peoples. In fact, there are more than 1,700 recommendations from treaty bodies, the UPR, and special procedures relating to the need to fully recognize the rights of indigenous peoples to their lands, territories and resources; to free prior and informed consent in order to prevent land grabbing and destruction of their resources; the need to ensure access to justice against the criminalization of indigenous peoples, including the disproportionate number of indigenous peoples in jail in many countries; the need to ratify ILO Convention 169 for the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples as state obligation, among other recommendations.

These recommendations clearly demonstrate the direct link of indigenous peoples' rights to advancing sustainable development that is also just, equitable and sustainable. If states will abide by their human rights obligations and commitments to indigenous peoples by implementing these recommendations, then it will provide the enabling environment for indigenous peoples' inclusion in the SDGs within the context of advancing their self-determined development that is not only sustainable but also holistic.

From last year to this year, the COVID 19 pandemic is causing major and severe setbacks to the implementation of the SDGs. For indigenous peoples, this has amplified the existing inequality and discrimination, which are key factors that will leave indigenous peoples further behind in achieving sustainable development. Millions of indigenous children already struggling to pursue their education are not able to cope with the shift to e-learning, home study and other restrictions. Likewise, indigenous women became more vulnerable to violence and abuse given the lockdowns and indigenous persons with disabilities are further marginalized.

The global call now under the UN is to build back better and advance sustainable recovery to achieve the SDGs. While indigenous peoples need to be part of the recovery, it is important for indigenous peoples to pay attention to the recovery plans by the respective governments, as well as clear attempts for green-washing for example in the name of "nature-based solutions" being promoted by corporations. A growing number of countries are justifying unsustainable economic recovery plans to cope with the impacts of the pandemic. These plans are again largely based on resource extraction with the expansion of agribusiness, coal mining and renewable energy projects with adverse impacts on indigenous peoples' livelihoods and cultural heritage. Even environmental safeguards are being weakened to fast-track investments and projects for economic growth. Likewise, many authoritarian states are imposing more restrictions to fundamental rights and

freedoms to prevent opposition to their plans and actions in the name of COVID 19 recovery.

It would also be critical for indigenous peoples to build and strengthen partnerships with UN agencies in advancing the SDGs based on indigenous peoples' perspectives, needs and aspirations. This should include engagement and collaboration with UN country teams. A growing number of philanthropists are also supporting the SDGs on education, reducing poverty and ending hunger, access to renewable energy, among others. Indigenous peoples organizations and networks can leverage their work on these goals to collaborate and partner with donors. Many local governments are also now becoming more sensitive to the needs of their constituents in localizing the SDGs. This can be opportunities for indigenous peoples to engage with local governments and establish platforms for collaboration in addressing the needs and priorities of indigenous peoples.

To conclude, indigenous peoples need to continue to build and strengthen our capacities, organizations, networks and solidarity relations at all levels to amplify our voices, advance the respect and protection of our rights and wellbeing in the implementation of the SDGs as we continue to pursue our self-determined development and protect the future of the generations to come.

Thank you.