

ECOSOC Coordination and Management Meeting

2-3 July 2018
UNHQ, New York

**Chairperson's Statement on the Report of the
Seventeenth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous
Issues (16-27 April 2018)**

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for this opportunity to address the Council and present the report of the seventeenth session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. I would like to start by paying my respects to the Onondaga Nation – the indigenous peoples of this territory where we are meeting today.

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues held its seventeenth session from 16 to 27 April this year. More than 1,200 representatives of indigenous peoples, as well as NGOs, academics and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes attended the session. We were also pleased to have high-level officials from over 50 Member States at the session.

The overarching theme of this year's session was "Indigenous peoples' collective rights to lands, territories and resources", which are at the heart of indigenous peoples' struggles around the world. Indigenous peoples' relationship 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.

During our deliberations, drawing on the practical examples and practices brought to our attention, we noted the progress made as well as the vast challenges that remain. We are pleased that some States have recognized indigenous peoples' collective rights to lands, territories and resources in their constitutional and legal framework or through constructive agreements. There is growing recognition of these rights since the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007. It is also becoming increasingly clear that ensuring the rights of indigenous peoples to lands, territories and resources contributes not only to their wellbeing but also helps to address pressing global challenges such as climate change and environmental degradation.

International standard setting on the rights of indigenous peoples to lands, territories and resources have also advanced, including by regional mechanisms in Africa and the Americas. The Permanent Forum highlighted the recent decision of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights in the case of the Ogiek community in Kenya, that recognized their right to live on their land and that conservation efforts that displaced them were in violation of the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights. The Permanent Forum welcomes these positive developments and calls on the regional bodies to continue their work in this field, and to follow this example of upholding the rights of indigenous peoples

However, despite some achievements, the Permanent Forum is concerned that even in those countries where indigenous peoples' collective rights to lands, territories and resources are recognized, there is a wide gap between formal recognition and actual implementation. Land or resource mapping, demarcation and titling have often been postponed, delayed or not completed. Implementation of laws contradictory to the rights also results in the de facto denial of the rights accorded to indigenous peoples.

The Forum also expressed its grave concern about the lack of official recognition to indigenous peoples, particularly in Africa and Asia, and recommends that States incorporate the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into national legislation, policies and programmes.

At this year's session, the Forum heard a number of accounts of forced dispossession of indigenous peoples from their lands and resources for development, business or conservation purposes. The Forum drew attention to the disproportionately high rates of intimidation and reprisals against indigenous leaders and human rights defenders, including indigenous women.

The Forum paid particular attention to conservation efforts, as the impact of such activities on indigenous peoples is grave. It has been consistently demonstrated, that

ensuring indigenous peoples' rights to their lands, territories and resources is the most effective way to protect biodiversity and integrity of ecosystems. We are therefore asking DESA to organize an expert group meeting on this issue as input to the 2019 Permanent Forum session.

In follow-up to the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples 2014, the Permanent Forum appreciates the efforts made by few States to develop national action plans in consultation with indigenous peoples to implement the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In this regard, the Forum encourages States to share such good practices and to continue developing and implementing action plans or other appropriate measures. The Forum has also welcomed the consultation process on the ways to enhance the participation of indigenous peoples at the United Nations, including the recent interactive hearings of the President of the General Assembly. However, as the President himself noted, we cannot yet say that the United Nations has opened its doors wide enough for indigenous peoples and so, we need to be more ambitious. Further, the Forum has welcomed the work done by the United Nations system to implement its system-wide action plan on the rights of indigenous peoples and encouraged United Nations country teams to facilitate dialogue between States and indigenous peoples.

At this year's session, the Permanent Forum changed its methods of work, whereby the first week was devoted to plenary meetings and the second week included regional dialogues with indigenous peoples and Member States. These dialogues provided an opportunity to discuss issues of relevance in the countries of the region and identify how to sharpen the focus and impact of the Permanent Forum's analysis and recommendations. This new method of work was well received by representatives of indigenous peoples and Member States participating in the dialogues and we intend to continue this practice at next year's session.

We also continued the practice of holding closed dialogue meetings with Member States, indigenous peoples and UN agencies. I would like to thank the many States that participated in these frank discussions at the closed meeting and regional dialogues,

which are beneficial for the work of the Forum and I trust that this also proves useful for Member States as well as indigenous peoples.

The Permanent Forum also discussed the preparations for next year, which will be the International Year of Indigenous Languages. The Forum welcomed the action plan developed in cooperation with States, UN mechanisms, indigenous peoples and other stakeholders, and calls upon States to support the implementation of the action plan, including the allocation of financial resources.

In deliberations related to indigenous women, youth and children, the Permanent Forum has recommended that the Commission on the Status of Women organize a high level interactive dialogue on the rights of indigenous women in 2020. The Forum invites Member States to support this call, and looks forward to continuing our close collaboration with the Commission on the Status of Women in advancing the rights of indigenous women.

The Forum continued its deliberations on the opportunities and challenges of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and emphasizes that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is not possible without fulfilling the rights of indigenous peoples to lands, territories and resources. The Forum calls upon States to ensure the recognition of customary rights or tenure of indigenous peoples to their lands and resources under Sustainable Development Goal 2, which calls for secure and equal access to land.

The 2018 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development will be held next week, under the theme of “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies” where 47 countries will be conducting voluntary national reviews. In the third year of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, there has been some progress to include indigenous peoples in the reviews, however meaningful consideration to their issues is still lacking. The Forum also encourages States to work with indigenous peoples to develop guidelines for responsible renewable energy development with consideration to Sustainable Development Goal 7 on ensuring access to affordable and clean energy to all, which will

be reviewed this year and the implementation of which is posing opportunities as well as threats for indigenous peoples.

I am privileged to present to you the report on the seventeenth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. I believe that the analysis and recommendations contained in the report will enrich deliberations at the international level and will provide valuable inputs to the work of Member States at the national level to promote the rights and well-being of indigenous peoples.

Thank you for this opportunity to present the report of the Permanent Forum to the Council. And I look forward to your continued support as we step up our efforts to translate the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into concrete steps forward.
