

Opening remarks by
H. E. Ambassador Inga Rhonda King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines)
Vice President of the Economic and Social Council

at the

Seventeenth session of the
UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

General Assembly Hall
United Nations Headquarters, New York

16 April 2018

Your Excellency, Mr Evo Morales, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia,

Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,

Distinguished representatives of Member States, Indigenous Peoples' Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations,

Distinguished representatives of the UN system and intergovernmental organizations,

Distinguished Elders,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to address the opening of the 17th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

We are meeting at year three of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The overall focus of the 2030 Agenda on leaving no one behind and reducing inequalities makes it particularly important for indigenous peoples, who are almost universally in situations of disadvantage compared with other segments of the population. Many of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and targets are relevant to indigenous peoples and have direct linkages to the commitments in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

This year's theme for the Forum, "Indigenous peoples' collective right to lands, territories and resources", reminds us that around the world indigenous peoples are fighting for recognition of their right to own, manage and develop their traditional lands, territories and resources. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – the result of more than two decades of negotiation - emphasizes that indigenous peoples' control over their lands, territories and resources will enable them to "maintain and strengthen their institutions, cultures and traditions" and to "promote their development in accordance with their aspirations and needs".

Later this year, in July, we will keep the situation of indigenous peoples in mind when we meet at the high level political forum on sustainable development to review progress. The theme will be "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies". There will also be a focus on Sustainable Development Goals related to water and sanitation, energy, human settlements, consumption and

production and the protection and sustainable use of ecosystems, all of which are critical for indigenous peoples.

Indigenous peoples have much to contribute through their deep understanding of and connection with the land. If we look at indigenous lands and territories, they are there because you have been managing your environments sustainably for generations. I would like to encourage you to continue engaging in the 2030 Agenda. I also call on Member States to work with indigenous peoples, and learn from their extremely valuable contributions.

As an advisory body to the Economic and Social Council, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has an essential role in providing expert advice and recommendations as we consider the progress made and where increased efforts are needed, with regards to indigenous peoples.

I commend the efforts of the Permanent Forum to raise awareness on indigenous peoples in the work of other ECOSOC bodies. For example, the 62nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, in March this year, reflected in its agreed conclusions the need to “implement economic and social policies that promote and protect the rights of Indigenous women and girls living in rural and remote areas by addressing the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and barriers they face”. I would like to encourage the Forum to continue to engage with other ECOSOC bodies to address the diverse challenges that indigenous peoples face in multiple spheres - and to promote a more coherent and coordinated approach by the United Nations system.

Ladies and gentlemen,

If indigenous land rights are not respected, the future of indigenous peoples is jeopardized.

You have two weeks ahead of you with a full agenda for important and timely discussions on this and a range of other issues. The recommendations emerging from your discussions will be critical to ensure that the provisions of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are advanced in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

We look forward to the continued advice and guidance of the Permanent Forum in making indigenous issues an integral part of our work at the United Nations. We must keep our promise not to leave anyone – and that includes indigenous peoples - behind.

I wish you and all delegates successful deliberations during this 17th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Thank you.