

ECOSOC Management Meeting, 23–24 July 2019

UNHQ, New York

Remarks of the Chair of Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Ms. Anne Nuorgam

on the Report on the Eighteenth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

23 July 2019

Madam President,
Excellencies,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am privileged to present to you the report on the eighteenth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues held from 22 April to 3 May 2019. I believe that the analysis and recommendations contained in the report will enrich deliberations at the international level and provide valuable inputs to the work of Member States to promote the rights and wellbeing of indigenous peoples.

The 2019 session was attended by over 1,200 participants from indigenous peoples around the world, Member States, the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes as well as NGOs and the academia. We were also pleased to have representatives at the Ministerial level from around 15 Member States.

The special theme of the eighteenth session was “Traditional knowledge: generation, transmission and protection”. The Forum also deliberated on the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages; the 2030 Agenda; the follow-up to the World Conference on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and the mandated areas of the Forum with emphasis on indigenous human rights defenders and indigenous women, as well as a thematic session on Conservation.

Madam President,

The **special theme of our 2019 session was “Traditional knowledge: generation, transmission and protection”**, fundamental for indigenous peoples’ livelihoods and identities. Traditional knowledge contributes directly to sustaining biological and cultural diversity, poverty eradication, conflict resolution, food sovereignty and sound ecosystems.

Yet in many instances, traditional knowledge remains threatened by misappropriation, misuse and is not recognized or valued for its potential to contribute to addressing global challenges. The Permanent Forum believes it is of utmost importance to protect and strengthen indigenous peoples’ knowledge systems that go in tandem with protecting their rights, including the right to self-determination and the rights to lands, territories and resources.

2019 is the International Year of Indigenous Languages. The Forum noted with appreciation that numerous countries and organizations are implementing initiatives to recover, use, revitalize, and develop indigenous languages in close cooperation with indigenous peoples. However, the Forum reiterated its concern that 40 per cent of the estimated 6,700 languages spoken around the world are in danger of disappearing. The disappearance of their language puts the survival of the indigenous peoples themselves at high risk.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Forum remains concerned that indigenous peoples are not participating in all stages of the implementation of all the Sustainable Development Goals. Their engagement is crucial to provide input to the Voluntary National Reviews so indigenous peoples’ contributions are included in the outcome document of the high-level political forums convened under the auspices of the ECOSOC and of the General Assembly.

In **follow-up to the outcome document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples**, the Forum is concerned about the lack of implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, despite the commitments made in the outcome document. Given that the 2014 outcome document was adopted five years ago, the Forum would highly welcome accelerated progress on its implementation.

The Permanent Forum continued the practice of holding **regional dialogues as well as interactive dialogues** with Member States, indigenous peoples and UN agencies on the necessity to address the structural discrimination and marginalization confronting indigenous peoples. Wherever they may live, in developed or developing countries, indigenous peoples face the same challenges, and the situation of indigenous women and girls is even graver.

Sadly, it was again reported at the Forum that the situation of **indigenous human rights defenders** remains alarming as they continue to be harassed, criminalized, prosecuted or even killed for exercising their legitimate rights. The Forum called upon Member States to take a zero-tolerance approach to violence against indigenous human rights defenders, to develop and implement all measures necessary to respect and protect indigenous human rights defenders, to duly investigate any act against them, and to prosecute those responsible to the full extent of the law.

On the road to **Beijing +25**, the Forum reiterated its invitation to the Commission on the Status of Women to organize a high-level interactive dialogue on the rights of indigenous women, to coincide with the anniversary. This will give visibility and action to address the challenges faced by indigenous women - who continue to face discrimination and marginalization often with grave consequences – in all stages of the preparations and organization of this significant milestone to assess progress achieved.

I am pleased to say that the Forum also heard of many promising initiatives – many of them community-based – from different parts of the world, that can be replicated as good practices. It is encouraging that concrete steps are being taken to address historical injustices so that we can learn from the past, while addressing the future.

I would like to thank all the Member States for their participation at the session, which again proved to be highly beneficial to the work of the Forum, and, as I believe, also for the Member States and indigenous peoples. I would like to encourage Member States and the UN entities to continue their engagement and support for indigenous peoples including by the establishment of platforms to strengthen their partnership.

Madam President,

For its session in 2020, the Forum has identified “Peace, justice and strong institutions: the role of indigenous peoples in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16” as the special theme, so we can continue our deliberations and provide substantive input to achieving the 2030 Development Agenda through this important lens. We are also recommending an international expert group meeting on the same theme to provide substantive analysis in preparation for the annual session.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I look forward to your continued support to help build dignified, secure, peaceful, and prosperous lives for indigenous peoples and for the world.