

Draft Statement by UN Environment Programme

on “**Agenda Item 4: Implementation of the six mandated areas of the Permanent Forum (Education, Culture, Human Rights, Environment, Development, Health)**”

17th session of the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues

Thursday, 19 April 2018, 10:00-13:00, Conference Room 4, UNHQ

1. Madam Chair, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, thanks for the opportunity to contribute an environmental perspective to the implementation of the six mandated areas of the Permanent Forum.
2. Since the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples more than 10 years ago, the United Nations and Member States have made significant efforts to acknowledge and protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples, notwithstanding their efforts, we see alarming trends that work against the principles of the Declaration.
3. We see with concern the tendencies to restrict access and rights to lands, territories and to natural resources, the lack of Free Prior Informed Consent in many development projects including the ones operated through large corporations.
4. The threats and violence that indigenous and local communities face in their own countries for merely speaking out against environmental crimes is not acceptable. They are the ones who raise awareness about violations against the right to a healthy environment, the displacement from their lands in the name of large development projects and extractive industries and the exposure to hazardous waste and pollution and their effects on the health and survival of their own communities and the wider community at large.

5. We are watching the delegitimization of dissenting voices and growing attacks on environmental defenders as we heard this week.
6. Environmental defenders, particularly indigenous peoples, are key supporters and allies of the 2030 Agenda and the environmental cause. Supporting their work is important, and violence against them is not only a human rights issue, but it diminishes the potential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.
7. UN Environment is proud that the Latin American and Caribbean Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental matters was adopted last month. This is a truly historic agreement. UN Environment supported the process and is looking forward to contribute to its implementation also with indigenous peoples networks in the region.
8. I am pleased to inform that we now have an agreed Policy on Promoting Greater Protection for Environmental Defenders to which we welcome comments by indigenous peoples as we see this document as work in progress.
9. Through this Policy we seek to promote and protect civil society space within and outside of the UN, in line with the UN's normative framework of international human rights standards. These rights are guaranteed for all people, without discrimination.
10. This is part of the UN's purpose – UN Environment was established to protect the environment for the benefit of all and, therefore, supporting environmental rights and the people who defend them can in turn ensure environmental protection.
11. The situation of environmental defenders is critical, and Member States have clear obligations to protect them. This is also why UN Environment launched the Environmental Rights Initiative.

12. We invite you all to get in touch to join the Environmental Rights Initiative and coalition of environmental champions, as we continue to pursue environmental protection that recognises the vital role of indigenous peoples and their communities.
13. UN Environment is also using its convening power to bring new constituencies into this conversation.
14. We are a lead partner of the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, an international, multi-faith alliance that is working to bring the moral, ethical and political influence of the world's religions and faith leaders to bear on efforts to protect forests and their guardians.
15. The initiative has an explicit focus on defending the defenders of rainforests and to protecting the rights of indigenous peoples and forest communities.
16. Through both the Environmental Rights Initiative and the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, we will continue to ensure that UN Environmental is a platform for action to advance indigenous peoples' rights and protect environmental defenders.

Thank you.