



**SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL STATEMENT TO THE
EXPERT MECHANISM ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
TENTH SESSION**

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Item 6

Check against delivery

Mr Chairperson,

South Africa thanks panellists for their presentations.

Through the milestone adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 there has indeed been a notable shift in the profiling and giving a voice to the plight of indigenous peoples throughout the world. Together with the VDPA and the DDPA these important tools serve as an important framework in the promotion and protection of their rights. Ten years after the adoption of the Declaration, the world, however, is still grappling with repairing the ongoing consequences of the historical denial of the basic human rights of indigenous peoples. As we have heard in the last few days the negative activities of the transnational corporations including the extractive industries also remains a main threat for indigenous peoples.

Chairperson,

South Africa has come a long way since the adoption of the Declaration giving practical effect to the rights enshrined therein. Several initiatives are being undertaken by the Government in consultation with indigenous communities aimed at addressing in a comprehensive manner all pertinent issues affecting their rights. Key among them is the establishment of the Department of Traditional Affairs in 2009. The strategic role of the department is not only to assist the institution of traditional and the Khoi-san leadership to transform themselves to be strategic partners with Government in the development of their communities, but also to coordinate the traditional affairs activities at national, provincial and local government levels. This is meant to ensure that their needs in terms of development, service delivery, governance, access to indigenous knowledge systems, traditional courts and indigenous law, traditional healing and medicine are adequately met. Much progress has been made on the Traditional Khoi-San Leadership Bill following

extensive research and public consultations including with the Khoi-San groupings. The Bill seeks to recognise the Khoi-San or indigenous leaders, structures and communities and is currently subject to parliamentary process.

Significantly, the Government is engaged in active dialogue with indigenous communities in order to preserve their language and culture. In acknowledgment of the importance of all the indigenous ethnic groups that live within the borders of the country, the Constitution recognizes the importance of language as a signifier of identity. The current policy and legal framework not only initiates a fresh approach to multilingualism in South Africa, but strongly encourages the utilisation of the indigenous languages as official languages in order to foster and promote national unity. The Pan South African Language Board Act has been applied in South African cultural and language communities to protect and promote indigenous languages. The Board further recently hosted the Language Activism Month.

In 2016, the annual Heritage Day theme called on us to assert our inclusive African identity by paying tribute to South Africa's Living Human Treasures who are custodians of indigenous knowledge systems. They are living legends who possess rare insight into our culture, oral history and past lived experiences. South Africa's interest in recognising and safeguarding this living heritage is part of our nation's aspiration to guarantee the full potential of its diverse, yet shared future.

Finally Chairperson, South Africa supports the call for a Convention with legally binding norms and standards for the maximum promotion, protection and fulfillment of the rights of indigenous peoples which will provide effective legal remedies and recourse.

I thank you