



SIERRA LEONE

27TH SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

CLUSTERED INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES & THE EXPERT MECHANISM ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

STATEMENT BY MS. CASSANDRA LABOR-BANGURA

17 September 2014

Mr. Vice-President,

My delegation would like to thank the Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples, and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples for their respective reports which have provided us with comprehensive insights into this issue requiring the attention of the Council.

Sierra Leone appreciates that in order for indigenous people to retain a distinct cultural and social identity, the particular human rights situation of this group must be considered from a country-specific basis. This falls within the framework of an established development agenda and would help protect their autonomy within a wider society.

In reviewing the various reports on indigenous peoples presented to this session, Sierra Leone would like to refer particularly to two main areas, which deserve our attention.

Firstly, it is in relation to climate change and disaster risk reduction. The recent Climate Change report notes that the lifestyles of indigenous peoples, often dependent on natural resources, are highly sensitive to climate change policies.

Climate change affects the enjoyment of a range of human rights, including the right to life, the right to health and the right to food. To protect these rights, indigenous peoples should receive the relevant education and awareness raising, should be involved in the preparation of plans and in the development and implementation of early warning systems.

Secondly, my delegation would like to make specific reference to the subject of business and human rights of indigenous peoples. In order to ensure that the rights of indigenous are not violated by businesses, governments should put in place appropriate legislation, particularly targeting abuse by unscrupulous businesses, ensure that contracts and agreements are fair, educate indigenous peoples of their rights and provide recourse to justice.

My delegation notes the human rights training and advocacy efforts of the Expert Mechanism and the OHCHR which has taken place in various countries in order to further awareness-raising. Training and capacity building will help protect natural resources and cultural expression with due consideration given to economic, social and cultural rights.

Article 11 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples provides that indigenous peoples shall have the right to practice their customs and traditions, and also provides that they should have right to effective redress from States should such rights be violated. Sierra Leone believes indigenous communities have the right to revitalize their cultural heritage by keeping alive cultural practices and traditions. Africa is a continent rich is diverse ethnic groups and indigenous communities. In the past, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has addressed the rights of indigenous peoples in certain African countries.

My delegation supports the suggestion that communities should be actively involved in awareness-raising processes. In this connection, indigenous peoples should be involved from the outset in formulating local development strategies and policy planning. My delegation also agrees that this would speed up implementation and also help avoid conflicts on how best it can be promoted and assured.

Although there has been some progress in addressing the rights of indigenous peoples, some challenges remain, including a continuing lack of access to traditional lands and certain integration and isolationist policies. In addition, my delegation notes that some indigenous communities continue to face discrimination and struggle to combat ingrained prejudice.

In this regard, consideration should be given to further advancing international law and policy at the national and regional levels in order to develop political and legal structures which better advance the rights of indigenous peoples.

Thank you, Mr. Vice- President.