

May 19, 2011

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 10th Session
New York (16 to 27th May 2011)

Agenda Item 4: Human Rights
Statement of African Indigenous Peoples Caucus

Presenter: Mr. Hezron Ripko, Executive Director – Pokot Educational and Development Programme (Kenya).

Thank you Madam Chair.

It is important for you to know that all over Africa, where indigenous populations exist, we have a number of human rights abuses. I would like to draw your attention to examples of human rights abuses affecting indigenous peoples all over Africa.

1. National governments have deprived the indigenous peoples of the right to access water, both in rivers and lakes, as well as already existing boreholes. In some cases, dams have been built to stop the free flow of water to indigenous lands.
2. Indigenous peoples face a lack of security services. Often police headquarters are far from indigenous lands because those headquarters are only erected in urban areas, and therefore it can take hours for police to respond to crimes.
3. Indigenous peoples in Africa face forced migration and illegal expropriation of indigenous lands. There have been numerous forced migrations conducted by governments all around Africa. Indigenous peoples are forced to migrate so that governments, in collaboration with private investors, can exploit indigenous lands for their own private gain by mining diamonds and oil, among other commodities.
4. A related issue is the use of child labour in mining operations and private farms, for instance to herd cattle. Indigenous children in Africa often live in poverty and therefore they are vulnerable to being recruited as cheap labour.
5. The use of negative and derogatory names to refer to indigenous groups. These names reflect a negative attitude toward indigenous peoples, which causes indigenous people to feel unwelcome in the presence of the national majorities. These attitudes can cause indigenous peoples to try to hide their ethnic origin so they can be accepted by the larger society or at least be less discriminated against both in schools and on the streets. But this disguise does not often reach far because like any other indigenous peoples around the world, they are easily recognizable by their physical appearance and habits associated with language and accent, these features quickly betray their disguise.
6. In the domain of education, indigenous students do not enjoy the same scholarship opportunities as other students. As a result, indigenous students are unable to pursue the degrees they want to. Furthermore, there is no availability of mother tongue instruction in school curriculums. Because of this, many indigenous languages are dying out or have become extinct.

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7. The sexual abuse and exploitation of indigenous women. There are examples of the use of rape to humiliate indigenous women when they stand up and demand their rights. Also, harsh conditions of life have forced some indigenous women to turn to prostitution because the government has failed to provide them with any other way of making money.

Madam Chair, the human rights violations faced by African indigenous peoples make it clear that many African states are not respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and it is depressing to know that these issues still persist 10 years after the founding of the Permanent Forum. Therefore, we strongly urge the Permanent Forum to:

1. Conduct continuous monitoring of African countries to ensure that they are abiding by the U.N. Declaration as well as relevant national and international laws.
2. Exert pressure on African governments to ratify treaties recognizing the territorial rights of indigenous peoples.
3. We ask the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Situation of the Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous Peoples to conduct a study of human rights violations of African indigenous peoples through consultation with African indigenous groups and report back to the Forum.

Thank you Madam Chair.