

UN Human Rights Council
Half-day panel discussions on the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples

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[First Segment]

Delivered by
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Mr. President, Distinguished Participants,

I would like to thank the President of the Council for organizing this panel discussion, and for inviting me to be part of the panel. I will limit my statement to providing some introductory remarks concerning the importance of ensuring the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in the World Conference process.

Generally speaking, indigenous peoples have welcomed the General Assembly's decision to hold the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, in particular because it has been decided that the conference should focus on the realization of the rights of indigenous peoples, including rights recognized in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

It is indeed encouraging that the United Nations, only three years after the adoption of the UNDRIP, decided to make serious efforts in meeting one of the most fundamental requirements under the Declaration; namely to promote respect for and full application of the provisions of the Declaration, and to follow-up the effectiveness of the instrument.

The 2007 adoption of the Declaration is rightly considered a milestone in the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples. Let us aspire to ensure that World Conference becomes another milestone in the struggle for dignity and justice for indigenous peoples, by trying to make sure that indigenous peoples' rights become a reality on the ground - around the world.

The UNDRIP is the result of an open and inclusive process of dialogue and negotiations among, and between, Member States and Indigenous Peoples. The World Conference provides an excellent opportunity for the United Nations to continue this inclusive practice.

I believe we can all agree on one fundamental issue, and that is, that the full and effective participation of the rights holders – the indigenous peoples - is secured in the World Conference process; because this is a prerequisite for the success and legitimacy of the World Conference.

The organizational arrangements for the World Conference, as contained in the modalities resolution, adopted by the General Assembly in September 2012, provide an innovative basis and framework for indigenous peoples' participation at the General Assembly level, inspired by the practice established during the Declaration process, and by the Declaration itself. The resolution also encourages participation of indigenous women, youth, elders and persons with disabilities.

The Declaration provides minimum standards for indigenous peoples' participation in decision-making processes affecting them. Therefore, these standards should be respected at all of the stages of the World Conference process, including the definition of its outcome.

For this to happen, it is required that Member States and Indigenous Peoples alike, demonstrate good faith, flexibility and a genuine desire to find procedural and substantive solutions that advance the objectives of the Conference and the UNDRIP.

The modalities resolution requires that the President of the General Assembly (PGA) consult not only Member States, but also indigenous peoples, and take into account the views emerging from the preparatory process, when preparing the draft outcome document of the World Conference.

In order to make this possible, representatives of indigenous peoples need access to the consultations carried out by the PGA, on the remaining organizational matters, and the outcome document. Among other things, this requires that consultations are scheduled sufficient time in advance, so that indigenous peoples can send their representatives to New York.

It also requires that indigenous peoples are provided necessary financial assistance, as many would otherwise not be able to participate in the process. The General Assembly has expanded the mandate of the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples, so that it can assist indigenous peoples to participate in the World Conference. Unfortunately, the expansion of the mandate has so far, generated limited interest and pledges from States.

Finally, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that indigenous peoples, throughout the last 1 ½ years, have carried out regional, thematic and global preparatory processes, including the holding of a global indigenous preparatory conference in Alta, Norway, June 2013, with the participation of approximately 600 delegates and observers.

The Preparatory Conference adopted an outcome document, by consensus, known as the Alta Outcome Document. This document needs to be taken into account in the work on the outcome document of the World Conference; because it is required that indigenous peoples are provided with an opportunity to effectively contribute towards shaping the outcome of the World Conference.

Thank you.