

Check against delivery

51st session of the Human Rights Council
Annual panel discussion on the rights of indigenous peoples
Impact of social and economic recovery plans in the COVID-19 context
on indigenous peoples, with a special focus on food security
Address by Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris
Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights

Geneva, 28 September 2022
Room XX, Palais des Nations

Monsieur Vice-President,

Members of the Human Rights Council, distinguished panellists,

Excellencies, colleagues and friends,

It is a pleasure to open this panel on the impact of social and economic recovery plans in the COVID-19 context on indigenous peoples, with a special focus on food security.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, numerous reports had attested how, for many indigenous peoples around the globe, vital gains have been reversed. Pre-existing inequalities have deepened and jeopardized progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, two of which refer directly to indigenous peoples for achieving zero hunger and good nutrition (SDG 2) and quality education (SDG 4).

A key lesson learned of COVID-19 for the international community is that genuinely embedding human rights in all levels of decision-making processes is a pre-condition to building inclusive, stable and sustainable societies. Building back better requires placing human rights at the centre of the response, including in the development and implementation of COVID-19 social and economic recovery plans.

Indigenous peoples – the guardians of nature and the custodians of vast repositories of traditional knowledge around the world – are key actors and partners in this process. Their meaningful participation, including indigenous women, must be an overarching principle.

For the purpose of today's discussion, it means including and consulting indigenous peoples in the development and implementation of recovery plans,

including as they relate to the specificities of indigenous peoples' individual and collective rights to adequate food and to food security.

Protecting and promoting the rights of indigenous peoples, interpreted in context of their cultures and traditions, guides us to a more sustainable way of interacting with our planet, including how we produce and consume food.

Indigenous peoples rely on the natural resources of their lands, not only for subsistence but also for traditional cultural practices, including food practices. For indigenous peoples, food security is intrinsically connected to their rights to enjoyment and protection of their lands, territories and resources.

On the basis of the centrality of human rights in the work of the United Nations, our Office will continue to strengthen our partnerships across the UN system – in the spirit of the *Call to Action for Human Rights* and *Our Common Agenda* – to ensure that human rights and sustainability are at the heart of efforts to respond to and recover from the pandemic.

To this end, OHCHR mainstreams human rights in UN agencies' work and programmes to promote the strengthening of sustainable food systems, supports indigenous peoples in claiming the right to food and advocates for indigenous peoples effective and meaningful participation and leadership in COVID-19 response and mitigation strategies. The UN human rights mechanisms also continue to develop key jurisprudence and guidance for States and other stakeholders in these areas.

Moreover, OHCHR's Senior Indigenous Fellows deployed in 31 field presences, United Nations Country Teams and peace operations around the world¹, are playing important roles in supporting enjoyment of the right to food

¹ There are currently OHCHR Senior Indigenous and Minorities Fellows posted in Argentina (UNCT), Brazil (UNCT), Bolivia (UNCT), Burundi(UNCT), Cameroon (Regional Office), Chile (Regional Office), Colombia, Costa Rica (UNCT), Dominican Republic (UNCT), Ecuador, Fiji (Regional Office), Guatemala, Guyana (UNCT), Iraq (PKM), Jordan (UNCT), Kenya (Country Office), Mexico (Country Office), Montenegro, Nepal, Nigeria (UNCT), Paraguay, Peru, Philippines (UNCT), Uganda (Country Office), Ukraine (Country Office), Yemen (Country Office). There are 2 SFs supporting the work of the Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples (Australia) and an IMPS

and food systems as it applies to indigenous peoples. Together with our field presences, they are fostering greater capacity for indigenous peoples to exercise and vindicate their right to food and related issues, including by using the existing national and international human rights norms and mechanisms and the SDG processes.

These Fellows are also valuable resources in supporting States in ensuring that indigenous peoples' right to participate fully and effectively in decision-making processes that affect them is respected, including in the development and implementation of national pathways to follow up on the recommendations of the UN Food Systems Summit of September last year.²

Monsieur Vice-President,

Today's panel discussion will analyze the impact of social and economic recovery plans in the COVID-19 context on indigenous peoples, particularly in relation to food security. It will also examine the extent which indigenous peoples have been consulted and the extent to which their free, prior and informed consent was sought and obtained throughout these processes.

Our distinguished panellists will help identify good practices, lessons learned and current challenges for the protection of indigenous peoples' right to food. This right forms the basis for enhancing and promoting indigenous peoples' food systems, and is intimately linked to their rights to land and resources, and to freely pursue their right to development.

We are privileged to have with us four of the foremost global experts on the topic: José Francisco Calí Tzay, Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples; Myrna Cunningham, First Vice-President of the Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean;

Senior Fellow supporting the Special Rapporteur on Minorities. Total of current SFs: 32

² <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/about> . The Summit set the stage for global food systems transformation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

Binota Moy Dhamai, Chair of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Yon Fernández-de-Larrinoa, Head of the Indigenous Peoples Unit, Partnerships and United Nations Collaboration Division of FAO.

Over the past year, they have explored and assessed the impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples. In their 2020 and 2021 reports, respectively, both the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Expert Mechanism have highlighted how pre-existing food insecurity in indigenous communities has been exacerbated by the pandemic lockdowns and by other containment methods used to tackle the virus. Such insecurity has been further aggravated by the denial of indigenous land rights, the lack of respect for the right to self-determination in relation to indigenous territories and the disruption of local and traditional economies.

I wish to extend our thanks to the panellists for dedication and commitment to the rights of indigenous peoples. We look forward to your remarks as we explore this important issue.

Thank you, and I wish you a fruitful discussion.