



INTERVENTION

THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

[Fiji Mission to the United Nations in Geneva]

Thank you Mr. President.

The Special Rapporteur sets out the importance of land and resources for the indigenous.

In Fiji, the indigenous people's culture, custom, language and traditions have a sacred relationship to their land and environment. It is for this reason that the Fijian Government has strived to give them all protections which safeguard their right to self-determination; particularly, where land and natural resources are concerned. In Fiji, about 87% of all land is inalienable indigenous land. That ownership of land is protected by the Constitution. The majority of the people of Fiji are indigenous to Fiji.

Like many other SIDS, Fiji faces the real threats posed by climate change and has identified 63 coastal communities which require relocation due to rising sea levels. The first successful relocation was an indigenous coastal village called Vunidogoloa, in 2014. The strategy required a holistic approach in order to preserve and retain their cultural identity despite the relocation and even included the relocation of their ancestral burial grounds.

The special relationship between indigenous communities and the environment was specifically recognised at COP 23 under Fiji's Presidency, with the adoption of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform. The Platform is designed to strengthen the knowledge, technologies, practices and efforts of local communities and indigenous peoples related to addressing and responding to climate change, to facilitate the exchange of experience and the sharing of best practices and lessons learned on mitigation and adaptation in a holistic and integrated manner, and to enhance the engagement of local communities and indigenous peoples in the international climate change processes.

We need to collectively assess how this Council can further strengthen the voices of Indigenous peoples, specifically those which make up marginalised populations, and we look to the Special Rapporteur's leadership in this regard.

I thank you Mr President.