

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII),

Sixteenth Session

24 April – 05 May, 2017

Agenda Item 12

Future Work of the Permanent Forum:

Statement by the Amerindian Peoples Association (APA) of Guyana

Presented by Laura George

Madam Chair, thank you for giving me the opportunity to present on the future work of the permanent forum. I wish to first acknowledge the numerous years of work by indigenous leaders throughout the world for their consistency and commitment that today we cannot be ignored in the global discussion such as the climate change negotiations and the 2030 Agenda.

Madam Chair, recognizing the multiple international efforts currently underway to address climate change and SDG Agenda, we wish to recommend to the Permanent Forum to conduct an evaluation of the achievements and impediments for effective participation and consultation of Indigenous Peoples particularly those of the Caribbean region. This evaluation should be done either in a study or be considered as the theme for the next international Expert Group Meeting.

We have a continuing concern with representation of indigenous leaders from Latin America and the Caribbean. Caribbean leaders are constantly left out or excluded from representing ourselves.

We are aware of how many countries have ratified the Paris Agreement, my country, Guyana, for example enthusiastically ratified this Agreement and further committed an area of 2 million hectares of our forests and wetlands to the

existing areas of conservation. However Madam Chair, indigenous peoples who have lived on these lands from time immemorial continue to be left out from being included in the national discussions and decision-making. In the further enthusiasm and commitment towards global agreements, our government has declared that we are now a “Green State” with a Strategy Document which was not consulted upon on how as a nation we can collectively decide how this is achieved and what impact mitigation will be applied. A “Land Commission of Inquiry” and the Terms of Reference thereof has recently been established which was done without the participation, consultation and the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of Indigenous Peoples. We would like to believe that the commitment of our government is genuine and look forward to revisit of decisions and engage Indigenous Peoples and our leaders in dialogue for effective mechanisms that do not discriminate.

I wish to refer to the July 2016 report of the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz where she reiterates that “respect of indigenous peoples rights should be integral in all policy decisions and programmes related to protected areas made by States, conservation organizations and donors, especially when these protected areas overlap with indigenous peoples’ territories.”

Working towards the 2030 Agenda Madam Chair, we look forward to being included in designing how we will achieve the Goals and Indicators. I therefore wish to emphasize that protection and recognition of customary tenure systems is critical to achieving these goals in the articulation of human rights standards and principles as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the name of our youth and our generations to come.

Thank you.