

EU Statement – United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues: Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Summary: 27 April 2015, New York - Statement on behalf of the European Union by Mr. Silvio Gonzato, Director of Human Rights and Democracy, European External Action Service, at the Economic and Social Council, 14th Session of UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues Item 7 (a): Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (with specific focus on economic, social and cultural rights)

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Madame Chairperson,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the European Union. We take this opportunity to express our support to the Permanent Forum as an important venue for the promotion of dialogue between governments, representatives of indigenous peoples and the UN system. As it is the first time that the EU is taking the floor during this session, allow me also to congratulate you on your election as the chair of the Forum.

The European Union is founded on the principles of equality and non-discrimination and seeks to integrate human rights into all aspects of its external policies, and it pays particular attention to the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples across the globe.

My intervention today should be seen in the context of the follow up to the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) last September.

At the World Conference, the EU actively contributed to the adoption of the action oriented outcome document. The document will provide guidance for further action needed to fully make the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples a reality. The EU welcomes concerted global efforts in this regard, including the recommendations of the outcome document which call on the UN Secretary-General to develop a System-Wide Action Plan for the promotion of indigenous peoples' rights and ask him to assist in the development of national actions plans, strategies or other measures. We are looking forward to the presentation of the Action Plan by the end of the 70th session of the UN General Assembly.

The UN Declaration is also a key international framework for the realization of the right to participation of indigenous peoples through their own representative institutions. Strengthened efforts are needed to ensure their participation in the decision making that affects them at the UN, as also reflected in the World Conference outcome. We are looking forward to the Secretary-General's concrete proposals in this regard.

Madame Chairperson,

In the EU we also aim to improve our work on the issues related to the rights of indigenous peoples and are therefore conducting a review of our relevant policies. Though the decision to carry out

such review was made already in 2012, with the adoption of the EU Human Rights Strategy and Action Plan, the review itself has been greatly inspired by the World Conference outcome document.

The EU Policies on indigenous peoples date back to the 1990s, when the Council of the European Union adopted a resolution on indigenous peoples within the framework of its development cooperation. The rights of indigenous peoples have been given high importance both in our political dialogues with many partner countries and in our cooperation programmes. Following the World Conference, we are including the national and international implementation of the Outcome document of the WCIP in our bilateral contacts.

From our side, we expect the current review of the EU policies, which aims at developing a Strengthened EU Policy on indigenous peoples, to shape also the EU's contribution to the implementation of the Conference outcome document.

One of the principles guiding our action is that of ensuring the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in the formulation of policies affecting them. In line with this principle, the EU has organised two consultations with indigenous peoples in the context of the afore-mentioned review.

While the first consultation, a brainstorming workshop held in Brussels in March, brought together representatives of the Arctic indigenous peoples from North America and Europe as well as experts on indigenous peoples' rights, the second consultation held on 26 April in New York entailed a global consultation with the participation of indigenous peoples' representatives and experts from all regions of the world.

Both occasions offered the possibility to share and exchange views on a number of topics and to present the preliminary results of a mapping conducted on the policies, initiatives and activities undertaken by the European External Action Service and the European Commission with regard to indigenous peoples.

We are grateful to the participants of both consultations for sharing their views with us and for presenting specific recommendations. While these contributions will be analysed in detail, we are pleased to note the support expressed to the work done by the EU in this policy field.

Madame Chairperson,

This session has also been presented with a study that refers i.a. to the alarming suicide rates among indigenous youth, and among young men in particular. This tragic state illustrates the urgency of the call made also in the course of our consultations to apply a gender sensitive approach in our efforts to implement the rights of indigenous peoples. We support this call and are committed to follow up on it.

We expect to conclude our review and have a strengthened policy on indigenous peoples adopted by early 2016. Pending this, I can assure you that we are already contributing actively to the realization of the rights of indigenous peoples around the world. By September, the European Union will have adopted its Human Rights Action Plan for the years 2015-2020. The Action Plan is also expected to include a focus on the rights of indigenous peoples, both in the context of our reinvigorated approach to fight discrimination, and from the perspective of social and economic rights.

We hope to present the first results of the human rights action plan as well as the EU renewed policy on indigenous peoples in 2017 and in that context are also looking forward to the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Conference outcome document at the 70th session of the General Assembly.

Thank you, Madame Chairperson.