

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur
on the rights of indigenous peoples - item 3 & 5**

Speaker: Glenn Payot

Mister Special Rapporteur,

At the outset, Minority Rights Group (MRG) would like to warmly congratulate you on your appointment. As highlighted yesterday during the panel discussion, you are starting your term at a time of great challenges for indigenous peoples and their defenders. This is especially true for those who seek to claim or defend their right to land, who face not only land-grabbing but also threats, intimidation and violence, in the name of the promotion of development projects or conservation initiatives.

On this last point, MRG wishes to bring your attention to the growing problem of “fortress conservation” projects, that are too often designed and enforced at the detriment of the rights of indigenous peoples.

It is now well established that no one has contributed more and benefited less than indigenous peoples with respect to protecting our environment. Yet, conservation has become a major threat to indigenous territories. About half the land selected for protection by conservationists and governments over the past century was either occupied or used by indigenous peoples. The creation of these protected areas often results in their displacement and continued exclusion from their traditional territories without compensation, consultation or their free, prior and informed consent.

Indigenous peoples who merely seek to return to their territories to engage in subsistence activities and cultural and religious rites are routinely arrested or killed by park rangers in protected areas in **Nepal**, **Northeast India**, the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, and **Cameroon**, among other States.

MRG stands ready to work with your mandate to address this major challenge to the rights of indigenous peoples.

I thank you.