



INTERNATIONAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE OF  
NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS FOR THE PROMOTION AND  
PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (ICC)

**Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples  
4<sup>th</sup> session – Geneva, 11 to 15 July 2011**

**Opening Session  
11 July 2011**

**Statement by Rosslyn Noonan  
ICC Chairperson**

Chairperson,  
Madame President of the Human Rights Council,  
Madame High Commissioner,  
Distinguished delegates, representatives of indigenous peoples,

Kia ora, I am Rosslyn Noonan, Chairperson of the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions, and Chief Commissioner of the New Zealand Human Rights Commission. The ICC is the global network of national human rights institutions representing some 70 "A" accredited national institutions with a further 30 in the process of developing towards full UN Paris Principles compliance.

It is an honour to join you today for the opening of this 4<sup>th</sup> session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The quality of your work and the very inclusive consultative approach you have adopted in undertaking the thematic studies are very impressive and as a result the studies are, with good reason, widely respected.

Your outreach to national human rights institutions has given practical meaning to the General Assembly's call in resolution 60/251 that the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms should closely cooperate with national human rights institutions and ensure their most effective contribution to the Council's and its mechanisms' work.

There is a record number of national human rights institutions participating in this current session of the Expert Mechanism. This is an affirmation of the Expert Mechanism's growing significance and NHRIs' commitment to constructively contributing to its work. This participation could not have been achieved without the

active support and engagement of the OHCHR Indigenous Peoples Unit, to whose members I would like to pay public tribute today: Antti Korkeakivi, Samia Slimane, and Claire Charters.

With the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 we gained an authoritative and compelling statement of what it means to recognize and respect the human rights of Indigenous Peoples. The main challenge however is to translate those rights into daily reality for Indigenous Peoples, wherever they are, whoever they are. We know that today even where there is protective national legislation, in most places the rights of Indigenous Peoples are still observed if at all, only in part.

The lands of Indigenous Peoples are still being taken, for one purpose or another, without their free and informed consent. Indigenous languages are still disappearing and with them invaluable knowledge and wisdom which this planet can ill afford to lose. Indigenous children and young people are still being denied their birthright to grow up confident and secure in who they are, in their identity and competent and comfortable with the culture, traditions and language of their people. Which is why your study on Indigenous peoples and the right to participate in decision-making is so timely.

The studies you produce serve as important guidance for national actors as they work to translate the aspirations of the Declaration into tangible and meaningful processes, policies and outcomes.

National human rights institutions are among the key actors that can help promote the work of the Expert Mechanism in country. They are domestic actors that work to bridge the gap between the international system and national realities. The UN Paris Principles provide them with unique mandates, functions and status to fulfill this role effectively. A number already have specific mandates, and experience, in addressing Indigenous peoples' rights. Significantly most of those represented here today have Indigenous people amongst their members or on their staff.

The Human Rights Council – based on last year's EMRIP recommendations – has reaffirmed their crucial roles and responsibilities, in its resolution on Indigenous peoples and encouraged NHRIs to strengthen their capacities to fulfill that role effectively, including with the support of the Office of the High Commissioner. Most recently, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues recommended in the conclusions to its 10<sup>th</sup> session that OHCHR and UNDP continue their work in support of NHRIs and “focus on capacity development support to promote and protect indigenous peoples' rights”.

This is a welcome acknowledgement, as well as a clear challenge and one, on which we must build, individually as national human rights institutions, and collectively among our peers and partners in engaging with the Expert Mechanism and with OHCHR.

The Office of the High Commissioner provides critical assistance to national human rights institutions in building capacity and developing their activities in accordance with the Paris Principles. Following up from the 2009 international expert meeting in Bangkok, OHCHR in close cooperation with the ICC has convened a series of consultation meetings, to exchange experiences and best practices among NHRIs across all regions on their responsibilities to Indigenous peoples. NHRIs from all regions met this morning to exchange best practices and discuss challenges. The outcome of this consultation will be a practical guide for NHRIs.

Chairperson, as we build our capacities, we as NHRIs are committed to actively contributing to the work of the Expert Mechanisms. I wish you fruitful discussions.