

Human Rights Council 48th session

Annual half-day panel on the rights of indigenous peoples

“Situation of human rights of indigenous peoples facing the COVID-19 pandemic, with a special focus on the right to participation”

28 September 2021

Statement by the Nordic - Baltic Countries

Speaker: H.E. Ms Anna Jardfelt, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Sweden to the UN in Geneva

Madame President,

Esteemed panellists,

I deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic states.

While COVID-19 has affected us all, it amplifies pre-existing inequalities and has a disproportionate impact on those persons who are already being marginalized. In addition, many indigenous women and girls, indigenous LGBTIQ persons and indigenous persons with disabilities face multiple and intersecting discrimination.

It is with deep concern we note that some states have used the pandemic as a pretext to undermine the rights of indigenous peoples and that violence and harassment against indigenous human rights defenders have escalated. Human rights defenders are critical for the promotion and protection of human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law. Perpetrators of violence, abuses and harassment against them must be held accountable.

Efforts in response to the pandemic may have serious repercussions on the enjoyment of human rights. The crisis should never be taken as an excuse for undue restrictions of democracy, human rights, and rule of law. Emergency responses must be necessary, proportionate, temporary in nature and non-discriminatory and in line with international law.

Including indigenous peoples, and their organisations and institutions, in both the planning of containment measures and of measures to build back better from the pandemic, is paramount. In so doing, it is essential to keep bridging the digital divide and ensure that participation is accessible, inclusive, and meaningful.

Esteemed panellists,

How can the rights of indigenous peoples best be ensured by putting the right to self-determination into practice?

I thank you.