

Agenda Item 5 (d): (continued) Human rights dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Thursday, 28 April, 9am-10am. Submitted by the Tribal Link Foundation in collaboration with the Indigenous Peoples Major Group on the SDGs, presented by Carson Kiburo (Endorrios)

Mr. Chair, and distinguished panelists, throughout this session we have heard continuous reference to so-called protected areas and their impacts on Indigenous Peoples around the world. This is cause for concern as there is increasing international focus on “protected areas” as an integral part of the solution to address the inter-connected issues of climate change, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. The Leader’s Pledge for Nature, also known as the 30 x 30 Agenda, is one such example that is especially relevant because without clear safeguards, this initiative could be devastating for Indigenous Peoples globally.

According to various estimates, protected areas cover about 15 per cent of terrestrial and freshwater environments and 7 per cent of the marine realm, but only partly cover important sites for biodiversity. Protected areas are not yet fully ecologically representative or effectively and equitably managed. In contrast, report after report affirms that the worlds’ best-kept forest and ecosystems tend to be in Indigenous Peoples’ territories. These findings underscore that greater rule-making autonomy at the local level is associated with better forest management and livelihood benefits.

The Tribal Link Foundation welcomes the Special Rapporteur’s upcoming report on protected areas and urges the Special Rapporteur, EMRIP, and the Permanent Forum to dedicate further attention to this critical issue, which has and continues to negatively impact Indigenous Peoples.

Tribal Link Foundation further recommends that the three mechanisms co-coordinate and convene a series of expert group meetings on Protected Areas and their Impacts on Indigenous Peoples. The Permanent Forum should also consider Protected Areas and their Impacts on Indigenous Peoples as a theme for its next session.

Mr. Chair, while it is true that the international system has many times acknowledged the special relationship Indigenous Peoples have with their lands, territories, and resources, as well as their traditional knowledge, it is also true that Indigenous Peoples, along with other environmental defenders, are still suffering grave human rights abuses all around the world.

As Governments and international organizations plan to build back better from the impacts of the coronavirus, it is imperative to recognize that the historic colonial model of safeguarding landscapes and biodiversity through protected areas, has contributed to a long history of human rights violations. The difficult challenges of recovery must not strengthen, but rather counter these abhorrent trends. International, national, and local recovery efforts must include specific safeguards to uphold the internationally recognized human rights of Indigenous Peoples. Thank you.