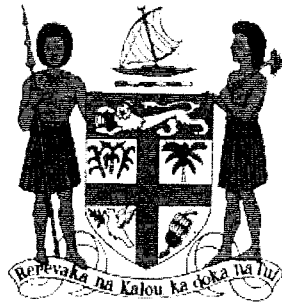


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Miriam Sanchez



STATEMENT AT THE 15<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE PERMANENT FORUM ON  
INDIGENOUS ISSUES

12 May 2016

Mr. Chairman,

I take this opportunity to firstly congratulate you and members of the Bureau on your election. Fiji is confident that with your strong leadership, this 15th session of the Forum will be a success.

I also extend to this forum the full commitment of the Fijian Government as we focus at this session on conflict, peace, and resolution.

Mr. Chairman,

Member States of the United Nations have achieved a lot to benefit the indigenous people since the last forum meeting. The success of the Paris Climate Change conference in 2015 was a milestone achievement for all humanity. The Fijian Government had stepped up its commitment to the Paris Agreement by becoming the first country to ratify the Agreement.

Climate change is having a profound impact with increasingly frequent and intense storms, floods and droughts. Majority of the indigenous people of Fiji live in maritime islands, low lying and coastal areas and are at the front line facing the brutal effects of climate change. They are at the forefront of rising sea waters and experience severe weather patterns changes that adversely affect and in some cases alter their daily lives and culture.

For its part, the Fijian Government is working hard to assist affected indigenous communities. For some, this involves the option of relocating them from their ancestral villages to higher ground. However, we recognize that relocation is not the only solution and cannot be done alone. It requires the assistance of development partners and agencies. Moreover, we need the international community to be working harder to arrest the current state of global warming that is triggering sea level rises and extreme weather events associated with climate change. A failure to address the adverse impact of climate change will setback efforts to assist the indigenous community in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

**Mr. Chairman,**

On 20th February this year, Fiji was struck by a category 5 Tropical Cyclone that destroyed schools and hospitals, decimated entire villages as well as critical infrastructure. Majority of those

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affected by the cyclone were indigenous community in rural areas. We wish to commend and express our sincere appreciation to the many development partners who came to Fiji's aid after the cyclone.

Most of the schools that were damaged by the Cyclone are populated by indigenous Fijian students. As part of the rebuilding process, several countries, including Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand, have "adopted" either one or a few Fijian schools that were damaged and are restoring the schools to proper functionality. The Fijian Government's "adopt a school" program allows focused reconstruction that will enable indigenous Fijian students and all school children the opportunity to go back to school sooner rather than later.

The right to education applies to each and every child in the world, without discrimination of race or ethnicity. Giving the opportunity of education to indigenous students is line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as the international community has made a commitment to provide inclusive and equitable education at all levels. ↷

**Mr. Chairman,**

The Fijian Government is committed to promoting the rights of all individuals and groups, including on cultural rights. These rights are embedded in Fiji's Constitution and there are adequate

provisions within it for redress. Several bodies are established by our Constitution to address human rights violations and discrimination. Indigenous communities are not excluded from this redress facilities.

The Fijian Constitution also protects all indigenous land by ensuring that ownership of the land remain with the customary owners at all times. Such indigenous land cannot be permanently alienated by sale, transfer, grant or exchange.

Proper and thorough consultations are undertaken with the relevant Fijian indigenous community and landowners, including relevant institutions, before any development is conducted on any land owned by the indigenous community. The Fijian Government is committed to ensuring that Free, Prior and Informed Consent of the indigenous community are obtained before any development on their is undertaken.

In addition, the Fijian Government is committed to respecting indigenous knowledge, culture and traditional practices as outlined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Fijian Government fully understands that this commitment contributes to the sustainable and equitable development of the indigenous community.

In this regard the Fijian Government is committed to the protection and full realization of basic human rights, especially for the most vulnerable in our society. As we embark on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Fijian Government will make sure that the indigenous people of Fiji are not left behind.

**Mr. Chairman,**

To conclude, my delegation expresses the hope that the relevant outcomes from this Forum will find their way into the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, Turkey.

A key objective of that Summit is to prevent and end conflict. It is our responsibility to find solutions to these.

The concerns raised at this Forum could benefit from further consideration at the World Humanitarian Summit. It can contribute to assisting indigenous communities who live in the front lines of various conflict to do so with dignity and peace.

I thank you.