



Oral Statement of the UN Forum on Indigenous People issues
New York, May 4th, 2017
Item 9
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Franciscans International welcomes the opportunity to address the UN Forum on Indigenous People Issues on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Franciscans International uses this opportunity to recall all relevant actors that the Declaration supplements and details other human rights instruments that provide for binding obligations for States and for rights protections that shall apply to everyone without discrimination on prohibited grounds such as ethnicity.

Franciscans International acknowledges the importance of the UN Declaration in affirming and defining specific rights and entitlements of indigenous peoples, as well as related State obligations so that indigenous persons and communities can enjoy their human rights on the same footing as other members of society.

However, working closely with Franciscans and other partners in many countries who support daily struggles of indigenous communities, Franciscans International is deeply concerned about the lived experience of systemic discrimination and denial of rights of too many indigenous individuals and communities over the world. Some of the most preoccupying and systemic violations of the rights of indigenous peoples affect the rights to land, to adequate housing, food and water, the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health as well as the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures.

The last years have witnessed an alarming number of indigenous leaders and activists resisting attacks on their rights and environment being harassed, threatened and killed. Many of them being women who stand for the rights of their communities, like the sadly emblematic case of the murder of Honduran indigenous leader Ms Berta Caceres last year shows. This has been documented and denounced by various UN special procedures of the Human Rights Council, including the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, as well as the Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights defenders; on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; and on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

Franciscans International is not only preoccupied by these violations of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of indigenous communities but also by the widespread impunity that the authors of these violations usually enjoy.

As also documented and analyzed by various UN and other human rights bodies, the widespread lack of full realization of the human rights of indigenous peoples, and the numerous and systemic violations of these rights are to a large extent consequences of a model of economic development that remains heavily based on the extraction of natural resources, often on the territories of indigenous peoples.

At the time when the international community is starting the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and more particularly focusing at the 2017 High Level Political Forum on eradicating poverty, including Goals 1, 2 and 3, the choice of a model of economic development based on the extraction and over exploitation of natural resources is highly questionable. This model as pursued is indeed an obstacle to the fulfilment of the sustainable development, climate justice and human rights commitments, and it affects disproportionately indigenous peoples.

Against this background and taking in due consideration to the challenges and concerns expressed in the present statement, Franciscans International urges States to:

- 1) respect, protect and fulfil the rights of indigenous individuals and communities, in particular as enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as an integral part of the international human rights legal framework;
- 2) acknowledge, address and effectively remedy the systematic violations of these rights generated by the model of economic development based on the massive extraction and overexploitation of natural resources;
- 3) recognize the legitimacy of the resistance of indigenous communities against these violations of their rights and effectively protect indigenous leaders acting as human rights defenders.

Thank you