

UN Human Rights Council

Half-day panel discussions on the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples

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[Second Segment]

Delivered by

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Mr. President, Distinguished Participants,

Despite positive international human rights standard-setting developments, including the adoption of the ILO Convention No. 169, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, indigenous peoples continue to face human rights violations, including discrimination, dispossession of lands and resources, and denial of other important rights - including right to culture, health, education, language etc.

The panelists have been invited to provide a human rights perspective to issues that are of central importance to indigenous peoples, and how these could be addressed in the context of the World Conference.

For me as an individual, it is difficult to decide what the most important human rights issues are for indigenous peoples, because the answer will obviously depend on which indigenous people is asked this question, and their particular situation.

However, indigenous peoples have already, collectively, responded to this challenge, through the adoption of the Alta Outcome Document, which is a consensus document, and the result of consultations and negotiations between, and among, indigenous peoples in all seven regions.

Therefore, the Alta Document should be an integral part of the foundation for the continuation of this process; because who else knows more about the challenges faced by indigenous peoples on the ground, than indigenous peoples themselves.

The Alta Document identifies four overarching themes that capture the issues that are regarded as being of greatest importance to indigenous peoples, in the context of the World Conference. Each theme is coupled with specific action-oriented recommendations. The four overarching themes are:

Theme 1: Indigenous peoples' lands, territories, resources, oceans and waters;

Theme 2: UN system action for the implementation of the rights of indigenous peoples;

Theme 3: Implementation of the rights of indigenous peoples; and

Theme 4: Indigenous peoples' priorities for development with free, prior and informed consent.

The themes and recommendations contained in the Alta Outcome Document reflect indigenous peoples' priorities, and indigenous peoples have stated that they have an expectation that the recommendations in the Alta Document will be taken into account, and incorporated in to the final outcome of the World Conference.

Due to time constraints, I will not elaborate further on the themes and recommendations contained in the Alta Document.

Instead, I will limit myself to highlighting one of the issues addressed to in the Alta Document; that is indigenous peoples' rights to lands, territories and waters. This is an issue of fundamental importance to indigenous peoples - around world.

This is because - lands, territories, resources, waters and oceans - traditionally used by indigenous peoples are the foundation of their societies and cultures, and continued access to, and control over these areas, is a prerequisite for the maintenance and development of their cultures and traditional livelihoods. In accordance to the UNDRIP, indigenous peoples have the right, as part of their right to self-determination, to determine priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands and territories.

In addition, other key elements of their cultures, such as language, traditional knowledge, songs, world views etc. are also dependent on prosperous indigenous communities that continuously develop uses of lands, waters and resources, in accordance with their own priorities and strategies for their development.

While traditional indigenous peoples' lands, waters and resources are crucial to their cultures and society, their lands and natural resources, are also of major interest to the majority population, and the society at large.

I believe it is fair to state that the nature and level of the conflict of interest, between indigenous peoples and the society at large that exists with regard to lands and resources, is not present, in the same manner, within other areas of importance to indigenous peoples, such as education, language, social affairs etc.

It is recognized, including by UN organs and mandates that the global effort to extract and develop mineral and fossil fuels, combined with the fact that much of what remains of such resources are actually located on indigenous peoples' lands, results in increasing negative effects on indigenous peoples.

This is why indigenous peoples have identified the realization of their right to lands, waters and resources, as one of the critically important issues in the context of the World Conference.

Thank you.