

UNICEF EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC REGIONAL OFFICE STATEMENT AT THE REGIONAL MEETING OF THE EXPERT
MECHANISM ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

13 July 2021

Distinguished Members of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous peoples and children spread across the region.

UNICEF congratulates the Expert Mechanism for its comprehensive study on the rights of Indigenous children, many of whom who continue to face systemic and widespread, multiple and overlapping discriminations and marginalisation.

In particular, UNICEF would like to recall that in light of the systematic discrimination they face, many Indigenous children have stood up for their rights, often taking the lead in the defence of Indigenous lands and territories, and at the forefront of movements to protect the environment and advocating for Indigenous peoples' collective rights worldwide. But in doing so, they also face high levels of risks, as children, as Indigenous children, and as human rights defenders.

UNICEF takes therefore this opportunity to suggest further reflection and emphasis in the Expert Mechanism study on the civil and political rights of Indigenous children, especially their rights to freedom of assembly and to freedom of expression, as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other relevant instruments. Further reflection on the right of all Indigenous children to access information about their rights, and on how to seek redress in case of violations, could also be useful.

Against this backdrop, UNICEF regional office for South East Asia and Pacific region, is also particularly concerned by the situation faced by all children living in the region including but not limited to, Masyarakat hukum adat in Indonesia, the Lumad in the Philippines, the Orang Asli in Malaysia and therefore concur with the Expert Mechanism that Indigenous children need an increased protection of their rights suitable for their peculiar needs and in the best interest of their lives.

We call on member States to recognize, in both law and practice, the rights of Indigenous children to be protected as a matter of priority not as our future but most prominently as our present. In other words, in the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to transform them from objects to direct subjects entitled to rights as of now. In closing let us remind ourselves that children do have their voices and if we cannot hear them it is due to our inability to listen.

Thank you.