



**SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL STATEMENT TO THE
17TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON
INDIGENOUS ISSUES (UNPFII),
DELIVERED BY THE CHIEF DIRECTOR
WILSON MAKGALANCHECHE OF COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE
AND TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS
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Agenda Item 8: theme: "Indigenous peoples collective rights to land,
territories and resources"

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Madam Chair

My delegation joins all the previous speakers in congratulating you on your election for the 17th Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. We are convinced that your stewardship will complement the vision of previous leadership towards the collective strive for the practical realization of the rights of indigenous peoples.

South Africa wishes to state for the record that indigenous peoples are citizens of the countries in which they live and cannot be treated as second class citizens in their own countries. International human rights law is predicated on the cardinal principle of non-discrimination. It is therefore impermissible to discriminate against indigenous peoples merely on their existence and their way of life.

Madame Chair,

My Government wishes to register its serious concerns that the Reports of the Forum do not reflect the entirety of the deliberations of the Sessions. We urge members of this forum to realize that, for the credibility of this Forum, it is imperative to comprehensively capture all the recommendations made within the forum. We are disappointed that critical issues such as (a) the havoc caused by Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises on the ancestral lands of indigenous peoples, including environmental degradation, and (b) a call for a legally binding instrument in the form of a Convention on the rights of indigenous peoples have not been highlighted in the Report.

Madam Chair

South Africa underlines its commitment to the underpinnings of African human rights law, namely, collective rights. It is for this reason that the theme under item 8 is of particular importance to us. The third united world conference against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance identified indigenous peoples as the second category of victims of historical injustices of slavery, slave trade, the trans-atlantic slave trade, colonialism and apartheid. This categorization is based on the gravity of suffering.

There can be no doubt that indigenous peoples were displaced from their traditional ancestral lands on a major scale by colonizers. These displacements and conquests denied them their right to livelihood based on access to their land, territories and resources. Even today, the same type of injustice continues unabated through the activities of multinational companies who continue to plunder the resources on these territories belonging to indigenous peoples, while leaving them uninhabitable and environmentally unsustainable.

Madam chair,

South Africans attained their political independence and freedom at the historical democratic elections of 27 April 1994, notwithstanding this landmark achievement the country continues to experience very high levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality, where the vast majority of land is still owned by less than 10 percent of the population. In recent times and with the present Government, key decisions have been taken for purposes of equal land redistribution to all South Africans in order to ensure economic growth, development and access to means of

production. The Government has also realized that there can be no equitable economic benefit to the majority of South Africans without the issue of land ownership being resolved. As a result the South African parliament is currently grappling with the issue of the expropriation of land without compensation while ensuring critical sectors of the economy , such as food security do not unduly suffer.

Madam Chair,

The current Parliamentary processes on the land reform issues, would among others, ensure that all South Africans have dignity and equality and become entrepreneurs; owning the means of production, that can allow them to transit into fully fledged commercial farmers using the land as a key resource for their livelihoods and sustainable development. It is incumbent on all members of the United Nations to ensure equality in the enjoyment of human rights within their national jurisdictions and to treat all citizens on an equal footing and with dignity. To this end, it is important to acknowledge that economic development and advancement can only come about when all have equal access to land, territories, resources and economic opportunities.

I thank you