

**MESSAGE OF YON FERNÁNDEZ DE LARRINOA,  
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**51st session of the Human Rights Council**  
**Annual half-day panel discussion on the rights of indigenous peoples**  
Theme: Impact of social and economic recovery plans in the COVID-19 context  
on indigenous peoples, with a special focus on food security  
**Wednesday, 28 September 2022, 10 a.m., Palais des Nations, Geneva.**

Excellencies, distinguished panelists, UN colleagues, Member countries.

It is a pleasure and honour to be with you all on behalf of UNFAO

I would like to touch upon the 3 objectives of this important discussion:

The impact of COVID19 on Indigenous Peoples and their food security;  
some opportunities and good practices to build from;

But particularly, I want to explain why the Right to Food is more important now than ever and why land, territories and natural resources are the essence of Indigenous Peoples' right to food.

The COVID19 pandemic has taught humankind many lessons, some hard to learn, others lessons that for years, we have resisted to accept despite the warnings.

UN Secretary General, has been very vocal about how inequalities across the globe are increasing, widening the gap between the few rich and the millions of poor. This growing poverty gap and inequality adds to hunger, with estimates placing hungry at more than 600 million by 2030.

The State of Food Insecurity (SOFI) confirmed that Food insecurity and hunger are increasing. They have been increasing for 5 years now, before the pandemic started.

Although COVID19 affected us all, as Secretary General Guterres mentioned, it affected us all in different manners.

Indigenous Peoples have been facing for years invisibility, inequality, marginalization, discrimination, displacement, violence, and pressures from extractive industries and intensive agriculture.

Despite the confinement, Indigenous Peoples saw violence increasing, and in some instances, they were falsely accused of generating the pandemic, in yet another episode of discrimination.

COVID19 for Indigenous Peoples was a crisis within a crisis. Furthermore, the systematic lack of recognition of their rights placed them at a greater risk of suffering the health and socio-economic effects of the pandemic.

Today, there is no clear data on the number of Indigenous Peoples who died from COVID19.

COVID19 affected those left behind by putting them even farther behind.

**My first message is that in the COVID19 recovery process, we ought to do additional efforts to ensure that Indigenous Peoples are not neglected, forgotten and ignored once again.**

What could we do all differently?

In July 2021, the Scientific Committee of the UN Food Systems Summit, recognized for the first time in a plenary session with countries, that Indigenous Peoples' food and knowledge systems are "game changers" for sustainability and resilience.

This recognition by scientists, thanks to the Wiphala paper and the exchanges of knowledge that the Global Hub on Indigenous Peoples' food systems and UNPFII organized.

The recognition of Indigenous Peoples food and knowledge systems as game changers, opened 2 opportunities:

It validated at the same level Indigenous Peoples' and scientific knowledges.

It also allowed countries and Indigenous Peoples to create a Coalition on Indigenous Peoples' food and knowledge systems

This Coalition to be launched in October enables a space of collective work by Indigenous Peoples, countries, Universities, UN organizations.

This is important because the COVID19 showed us that those Indigenous Peoples whose food systems are connected to healthy ecosystems, do maintain biodiversity while generating enough food for the community, even for feeding non indigenous communities.

**My second message is that If we want to preserve Biodiversity and address the climate crisis, we need to work with Indigenous Peoples at the center, in supporting Indigenous Peoples' food and knowledge systems with improved policies and programmes.**

Their food systems have myriads of examples of territorial management practices capable of producing and generating foods in sustainable and resilient ways.

These days we are witnessing how the interdependencies between the Right to Food, Food Security and Food Sovereignty are more evident than ever.

In 2005, The FAO council adopted the Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food. These Guidelines stated clearly that the right to food for Indigenous Peoples depended on the respect to their access to their lands, natural resources and territories.

2 years before the adoption of UNDRIP, the Right to Food Guidelines were clear: Without accessing their lands, Indigenous Peoples' right to food cannot be guaranteed.

The biocentric approach embedding Indigenous Peoples, values, beliefs and cosmogony, is essential in supporting the sustainability and resilience of their food and knowledge systems.

We can learn from their biocentric values and indeed there are some good developments.

Ecuador's Constitution recognizes the rights of Mother Earth. New Zealand's legislation recognizing the rights of the Te Urewera forest. Spain has recently recognized the rights of a polluted sea and there are ongoing discussions in the Netherlands and France about rivers and ecosystems.

FAO and Indigenous Peoples are working on restoring lands with an Indigenous Biocentric approach helping recover the memory of the territory while restoring degraded lands.

Biocentric efforts are more needed now than ever when looking at the effects that toxics and pollutants are having on earth's ecosystems.

In this sense, last week FAO hosted in Rome a meeting with the Special Rapporteur on Toxics, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Chair of the UNPFII, the Rotterdam Convention, WHO and the International Code of Conduct for Pesticides Management.

The result of this meeting was the agreement to work in updating the Code of Conduct for pesticides management to include Indigenous Peoples' rights.

Excellencies,

Without land, Indigenous Peoples do not have right to food.

And without a healthy territory, Indigenous Peoples will not have healthy foods and well-being.

We need to protect Indigenous Peoples' Food and Knowledge Systems to protect the remaining biodiversity.

In so doing, we need to give specific relevance to Indigenous Women.

They identify themselves as daughters of mother Earth. Their knowledge sometimes goes unnoticed but without them, there is no Indigenous Peoples food and knowledge systems, no biodiversity conservation, no right to food.

Let us remember it when we work together.

The Coalition on Indigenous Peoples food systems offers an opportunity to have a common space of work, but let us identify others where collective efforts by indigenous and non-indigenous peoples can advance the agenda.

Thank you