

Check against delivery



**Twenty-seventh session of the Human Rights Council**

**Half-day discussion on the promotion and protection of the rights of  
indigenous peoples in disaster risk reduction initiatives**

**Opening Remarks by Ms. Flavia Pansieri  
Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights**

**Geneva, Palais des Nations, Room XX**

**17 September 2014**

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome our distinguished panellists to this important discussion on **the rights of indigenous peoples in disaster risk reduction initiatives**. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to all the representatives of indigenous peoples who are present here today.

**Events of recent years have brought home to us how sharply disasters can affect indigenous peoples.** In the last twelve months alone, we have seen heat waves and floods in Odisha State, in India, which damaged the crops of indigenous farmers and their families, causing hunger. We have seen floods in the Amazon basin and in Manitoba, Canada affecting indigenous communities. And we have been appalled by the devastating impact on lives and livelihoods of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines – including the indigenous peoples in Capiz Province.

Today's discussion will enable us to share insights about the links between disaster risk reduction, human rights, and issues particularly important to indigenous peoples. The **Expert Mechanism's recent study** on the rights of indigenous peoples in the context of disaster risk reduction initiatives will be especially valuable. It pays particular attention to the right of indigenous peoples to participate in decision-making, the added vulnerability of indigenous peoples to disaster risk factors, and the contributions that indigenous peoples can make to disaster risk reduction. Albert Deterville, the Chair-Rapporteur of the

Expert Mechanism, is one of our panellists today, and he will be providing us with an overview of the study's main findings and advice.

As the study points out, from rising sea levels in the Pacific to milder winters in the far north, **indigenous peoples are among the first to face the consequences of climate change**, given their close relationship with the environment and its resources. Climate change exacerbates the human rights challenges faced by indigenous communities and places them at added risk of being affected by disasters. To tackle disaster risk reduction we must necessarily address the challenges of a changing climate, and we must focus in particular on indigenous communities.

The human rights impact of natural disasters may be sudden and catastrophic, or gradual and indirect. Apart from jeopardizing access to clean water, food, sanitation and livelihoods disasters may, for example, slowly erode human rights by increasing stress on already stretched health systems and housing. Often, such **negative effects of disasters are borne disproportionately by women and children – and varies enormously according to the community's exposure, vulnerability and resilience.**

Human action, via disaster risk reduction strategies, can mitigate these risks – and this is a matter of human rights. **When we adopt measures to reduce disaster risk, we must ensure that the voices of indigenous peoples, particularly women, are heard.** Because of their continued access to traditional knowledge and their relationship with their lands and territories, indigenous communities have a great deal to contribute, and it is crucial that their views are taken into account.

Today, thanks to the diversity of **our panellists**, we will be hearing about indigenous peoples' involvement in initiatives for disaster risk reduction, prevention and preparedness at the international, national and community levels. We will also hear from the perspectives of the UN system, national governments and indigenous peoples themselves.

But before I give our panel the floor, I want to highlight the **World Conference on Indigenous Peoples** that will take place in New York next week. OHCHR has consistently advocated for an inclusive World Conference with strong engagement of indigenous peoples, and I am very pleased to inform you that, through the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples, we will be supporting the participation of 84 indigenous representatives, from all regions, in the World Conference. I thank the Member States that have contributed to the Voluntary Fund, making this possible.

The World Conference is a unique opportunity. I trust that it will lead to **concrete measures to improve the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**, for example by drawing up and implementing national action plans to ensure that indigenous peoples can participate in decision-making, and that their rights are fully respected, including in disaster risk reduction.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the **Human Rights Council's strong and continued support for indigenous peoples' issues**. This annual half-day discussion, along with the interactive dialogues with the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous

Peoples and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, provide us with significant opportunities for advocacy and information regarding respect for the rights of indigenous peoples around the world. We at OHCHR look forward to continuing our work with the Council and all our partners and allies, towards our common goal of advancing the implementation of the rights of indigenous peoples.

I am certain that your discussions today will contribute to a deeper understanding of how States, indigenous peoples and the international community can work together to build a rights-based approach to disaster risk reduction that fully reflects the rights of indigenous peoples. I urge you to take the conclusions of this discussion into account in your national actions as well as in international efforts, including preparations for the **3<sup>rd</sup> World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction**.

Thank you.