

Human Rights Council 45th Session
Annual Panel Discussion on the rights of Indigenous peoples, September 23, 2020
Theme: The protection of Indigenous human rights defenders

Joint Statement (Canada, Australia, New Zealand)

Thank you, Madam President.

I have the honor of delivering this statement on behalf of Australia, New Zealand and my own country Canada.

We first wish to thank the panelists for their contribution today, and for the critical role that you play in advancing the promotion and protection of the human rights of Indigenous peoples. Although the laws of our countries recognize the rights and identities of Indigenous peoples, we acknowledge that structural inequalities and systemic discrimination still remain. Indigenous human rights defenders are essential in drawing public attention to these realities and preventing future violations.

We condemn in the strongest terms attacks on Indigenous human rights defenders. States carry the primary responsibility to protect Indigenous defenders undertaking legitimate actions to protect human rights, and to ensure accountability for any violations. We are committed to the creation of safe and inclusive spaces for all human rights defenders, with consideration to the specific challenges faced by Indigenous defenders.

Regarding these particular challenges, it is timely for the Council to discuss the protection of Indigenous human rights defenders in view of the Expert Mechanism's thematic report on the rights of Indigenous peoples to lands, territories and resources. Indeed, we acknowledge the 2018 findings of the Special Rapporteur that a crucial underlying cause of intensified attacks on Indigenous defenders is a lack of respect for collective land rights. Our countries recognize the importance of respecting and fulfilling Indigenous peoples' rights, as expressed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and of collaborating with Indigenous peoples on sustainable natural resource development.

We also recognize that in a broader context of structural racism, patterns of stigmatization and criminalization facing Indigenous peoples can be exacerbated for Indigenous human rights defenders. We are strongly committed to eliminating systemic racism in our respective countries and abroad, and in doing so, to working to ensure that the rights and freedoms of Indigenous peoples are universally respected.

Do the panelists have any recommendations for states to more effectively support women, two-spirit, takatāpui, or LGBTI Indigenous human rights defenders? Do they also have any comments on the advice from the Expert Mechanism's report on the persecution of defenders of Indigenous land?

Thank you.