

**Statement to the 17th session on the
UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples
by the Indigenous Media and Communication Caucus
April 16, 2018
Read by Monica Magnusson, Maya Leaders Alliance**

Thank you, Madam Chair,

On behalf of the Maya Leaders Alliance and the Toledo Alcaldes Association of Southern Belize. We would like to make a call to the international community to show solidarity to the Maya People of Southern Belize in our efforts to uphold our established rights to our lands.

We regret that the State of Belize has consistently failed to respect the rights of the Maya Peoples. Over the last two decades, the Maya Peoples have spent extensive time, energy, and resources to establish, before the domestic and international courts, that we have rights to our lands. In April 22, 2015 the Maya people of southern Belize achieved a groundbreaking victory_ at the Caribbean Court of Justice, Belize's highest appellate court. The court's decision reaffirmed that the 39 Q'eqchi and Mopan Maya Indigenous communities of southern Belize have rights to the lands we have customarily used and occupied and that these traditional land rights constitute property equal in legitimacy to any other form of property under Belizean law.

This month marks three years since that decision was issued. Sadly, we have yet to see any legitimate efforts on behalf of the Belize government to implement this decision.

We have exhausted all possible domestic and international legal mechanisms to obligate Belize to respect our collective rights to our lands, and still, the State has continued to allow third parties to adversely affect the value, use, and enjoyment of our lands. This includes issuing of concessions for oil exploration, logging, and the demolishing and desecration of our sacred sites, and undermining the authority of our traditionally elected leaders who defend our lands.

We ask members of the forum: what further recourse do we have as Indigenous Peoples when the executive branch of a government can choose to freely disregard the rule of law issued by their own Supreme Court, to disregard recommendations from the Inter-American Commission, to disregard the ruling of its highest appellate court, the Caribbean Court of Justice, to disregard two cycles of UPR Recommendations from their peers?

We simply request that the rule of law be respected. The Maya Peoples' land rights case has wide implications for litigation by Indigenous Peoples in Latin American and the Caribbean as well as internationally, and if the government is allowed to fail in upholding the rule of law, we will all go down a dangerous path.

We urge members of the forum and representatives of States present today to take note of this failure of the state of Belize to respect the rule of law, and be firm in recommendations to Belize during the 2018 review of Belize under the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review.

Belize must engage in a good faith consultation with the legitimate and traditionally elected representatives of the Maya Peoples, and that is the Toledo Alcaldes Association.

The State must:

1. Move forward to create an effective method to demarcate and title Maya land; recognize and publicly support the existence and validity of Maya customary rights over lands and resources, in accordance with the report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the judgments of the Supreme Court of Belize and the Caribbean Court of Justice;
2. Develop, through fully informed good-faith consultations with the Maya peoples, a legal framework to delimitate, demarcate, and title the territory of the Maya peoples of Belize;
3. Refrain from acting, or permitting or tolerating third parties to act, in ways that might affect the existence, value, use, or enjoyment of the property located

within the geographic area occupied and used by the Maya peoples, until such time as it has developed a mechanism to delineate, demarcate, and title or otherwise protect Maya lands in the Toledo District;

4. Repair the environmental damage resulting from logging and other concessions and leases extended on Maya lands.

Thank you Madam Chair.