

African Caucus Statement Made during the 15th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on the 12th of May 2016, New York, USA.

Speaker: Daniel ole Sapit

Honorable Chairperson, members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and Distinguished Indigenous Peoples, we most graciously recognize the indigenous owners of the land where we are gathered and appreciate their warm welcome.

This statement is being made on behalf of the African caucus representing Indigenous peoples and communities across the African continent.

Pertinent to the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the African caucus would like to highlight the adoption of the Report of the Working Group of the Commission on Human and Peoples Rights of the African Union as a key milestone in the continent. The adoption of the Report was instrumental in providing closure to the discordant voices in regards to the identity and recognition of Indigenous peoples and communities in Africa.

In implementing the UNDRIP, of critical importance are articles in the Declaration that address the responsibilities for states and the international community in promoting and protecting the rights contained therein. However, breathing life into all of the provisions of the Declaration will take action from Indigenous Peoples, States, UN agencies, NGOs and other organizations.

The rich and diverse cultures of Indigenous Peoples in Africa and in the world play a key role in defining their identities. The impact of colonial occupation and genocide, ongoing land grabbing, the destruction of their natural environment and resources, forced assimilation, and other pressures faced from outside forces, have harmed and threatened the cultural integrity of Indigenous Peoples in the continent. It is time that their equal worth and dignity is assured through the recognition and protection of not only their individual rights, but also their collective rights as distinct groups.

A fundamental principle of, and right affirmed in, the Declaration of Free, Prior and Informed Consent must be respected and used as a methodology when designing programs and projects that directly or indirectly affect Indigenous Peoples. The concept of development with identity recognizes that Indigenous Peoples assess the well-being of their communities and the appropriate use of their lands, territories and resources in a manner that is distinct from non-Indigenous communities as their visions for development are often predicated on systems of relationship with each other and the natural world, recognizing all of humanity and its inter-dependence on the Earth.

We would therefore like to make some recommendations to the African states:

1. Support and strengthen Indigenous education opportunities and skills in relevant areas so that Indigenous Peoples themselves can engage and participate in the various components of development programs and projects that affect them.
2. Strengthen Indigenous Peoples' own institutions and self-governing structures to endow them to take control of all aspects of their lives and to ensure that processes that might affect them are aligned with their own cultural values, customs, and world-views.
3. Afford Indigenous Peoples the opportunity to continue to progress and improve decision-making concerning development on their own terms, and to remedy any shortcomings through their own forms of internal regulation and accountability.

In conclusion, we would like to remind the African states that for generations, Indigenous Peoples have developed and maintained relationships with their land, territories and natural resources that have provided for their livelihoods and are the basis for their very existence as communities and this access and control over their homelands is central to the realization of the rights of all Indigenous Peoples in the continent and the globe.

Thank you Honorable Chair.