



Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Agenda item 5: Human rights dialogue with the Special Rapporteur
on the rights of indigenous peoples and the Expert Mechanism on
the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Statement by the European Union
22 April 2021

Respect for the rights of indigenous peoples as set out in the UNDRIP is a shared value within the European Union and forms part of our commitment to protect and promote human rights. The EU attaches great importance to the fact that the dialogue brings the UN indigenous mechanisms together for a dynamic exchange on issues related to your complementary mandates.

It also allows for effective linkages and coherence between discussions taking place in the Human Rights Council, the Third Committee and the indigenous mechanisms and we would like to thank you for the work that you so diligently carry out in fulfilling your important mandates.

The severe and disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on indigenous peoples has been the focus of the indigenous mechanisms. The last report of the Special Rapporteur highlighted how indigenous communities are being adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. It also underlines that indigenous peoples in many parts of the world continue to face significant challenges in claiming their rights as set out in the UNDRIP and that there had been an increase in attacks, killings and the criminalization of the activities of indigenous human rights defenders, especially those defending their traditional lands and natural resources.

The International Expert Group Meeting in December last year addressed the challenges faced by indigenous peoples during the pandemic. The report from the meeting stressed the need to ensure protection for indigenous peoples affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and prevent all forms of discrimination, especially in the context of timely, inclusive and equitable access to quality and affordable health care and services, including vaccines. It stressed the need to ensure effective participation of indigenous peoples in all recovery efforts.

The EU fully shares the concerns on how the pandemic has hit indigenous communities around the world. Indigenous peoples, in particular indigenous women

and girls, are disproportionately affected by health crises, while many of them live in isolated or remote communities, where health-care services are difficult to reach, have limited capacity or simply do not exist. These inequalities have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and have seriously limited full enjoyment of human rights by indigenous peoples.

The response to COVID 19 must take into account rights of indigenous peoples as set out in the UNDRIP including the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Universal and equitable access to quality health services, including vaccines, must be ensured. We also need to ensure the effective and meaningful participation and leadership of indigenous peoples in recovery instruments and policies. The EU is fully committed to supporting the rights of indigenous peoples as set out in the UNDRIP in its response to COVID-19, in accordance with the EU's Council Conclusions on Indigenous Peoples from May 2017 and the EU Guidelines for Human Rights Defenders.

The EU notes with concern that indigenous human rights defenders have experienced an increase in the attacks and intimidation against them during the pandemic. These acts are unacceptable and those responsible must be held accountable. We welcome steps taken to better prevent and react to such threats and reprisals.

The EU is committed to ensure a safe and enabling space for human rights defenders. EU delegations and embassies as well as our partners are monitoring the situation on the ground very closely in cooperation with indigenous peoples, indigenous rights defenders and organisations working to advance indigenous peoples' rights during the pandemic. For example, through its Crisis Facility, the EU has mobilised special funds to address the impact of the pandemic on indigenous peoples in Latin America, with a specific focus on human rights defenders. Indigenous human rights defenders are a group of priority since the launch of the ProtectDefenders.eu tool, receiving significant support.

This brings me to a question. In your view, what are the biggest challenges to ensuring that the rights of indigenous peoples are respected and protected, especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic? And looking ahead on the road to recovery - what will be the main challenges in building back better from an indigenous perspective?