

Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

11th session

9–13 July 2018

Item 7

Thank you Mr/Madam Chair,

I am presenting this statement on behalf of the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs.

Two days ago – as I had just arrived here in Geneva – I received the news that the total numbers of killed members of the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia over the past two years has now reached 68 leaders and community members. This is a very disturbing and distressing number. But unfortunately, not rare. Just last month 24 members of a Fulani community were killed in Mali. The examples of killing, criminalization, persecution and harassment of indigenous peoples are plenty. These are not just isolated examples, it is a worrying and unacceptable global trend. And it is time to act.

During the last 32 years, IWGIA has annually published "The Indigenous World", which is a one-of-a-kind documentation tool, that offers a comprehensive yearly overview of the state of indigenous peoples' rights in countries on all continents with detailed country reports.

One of the most worrisome trends that can be observed in many of the country reports published in the Indigenous World is an alarming increase of violent attacks against Indigenous leaders and community members who seek to defend and assert their rights. More than often, indigenous peoples are being attacked, harassed and killed in their endeavors to protect their lands and resources. To a large degree, perpetrators of crimes against indigenous rights defenders continue to act with impunity. In most cases these gross violations of their human rights arise in the context of indigenous peoples voicing opposition to extractive and investment projects. As reported by many indigenous representatives

during the discussion of the EMRIP's thematic study on FPIC, these projects are all too often developed without prior consultation and the informed consent of the peoples whose lands, territories and natural resources are affected.

Mr/ Madam Chair:

The Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Ms Kate Gilmore opened this session on Monday morning by reminding us of the systematic discrimination and exclusion Indigenous Peoples experience, tragically too often leading to attacks and killings, and highlighted the need to defend the defenders. And throughout the session we have heard stark accounts from indigenous representatives themselves.

International condemnation is growing against the persistent and gross human rights violations committed against indigenous human rights defenders.

The Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Ms Victoria Tauli-Corpuz has expressed her serious concerns about the situation in numerous country reports, communications to governments, press releases and other public statements. Her report on "Criminalization and attacks indigenous peoples defending their rights" to be presented to the Human Rights Council in September is indeed a timely and important contribution on this worrying issue..

As the killings, criminalization, persecution and harassment of indigenous peoples continues we need to persistently raise our voices, document the violations, and push states and the private sector to protect and respect the rights of indigenous peoples.

Effective preventive and protection measures **MUST** be urgently put in place. Therefore , IWGIA on the occasion of its 50th anniversary and with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, will host the

international conference “ Defending the defenders – New Alliances for protecting indigenous peoples rights”, to take place in Copenhagen on the 5th and 6th of September. The main aim of the conference is to understand why indigenous peoples are increasingly being targeted by violence and criminalization. The conference will examine the key drivers behind this global phenomenon , discuss context-specific cases and identify what can and should be done to change the current situation. It will pin out what actions UN mechanisms, regional human rights bodies, states and local actors must take. I would like to take advantage of this occasion to extend our invitation to the conference to EMRIP members and all participants who may be interested in this crucial issue

Finally, Mr/Madam Chair we would like to recommend the following:

- Request the UN special Rapporteur continuing giving special attention in future reports to the situation of indigenous human rights defenders, and particularly to look into issues related to access to justice as well as to collective protection and reparation measures.
- Request the EMRIP that In its country engagement, give particular priority to provide States with technical assistance on how to ensure the implementation of the recommendations of the SR related to the protection of Indigenous leaders and community members who seek to defend and assert their rights.