

Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

**Item 5 (d): Human Rights
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Intervention by Chair of UNVFIP, Mr. Pablo Mis

Madame Chair, Chairperson of the EMRIP, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, representatives of indigenous peoples, civil society and international and regional organizations, Your Excellencies:

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the 20th session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples (UNVFIP). At the outset, I would to seize this opportunity to acknowledge my colleagues in the Board of Trustees, namely: Ms. Tukumminnguaq Nykjær Olsen (Greenland/Denmark); Mr. Dev Kumar Sunuwar (Nepal); Ms. Marjolaine Étienne (Canada); and Mr. Diel Mochire Mwenge (Democratic Republic of Congo).

Madam Chair, the UN Voluntary Fund on Indigenous Peoples was established in 1985, when the voice of indigenous peoples at the United Nations was still very hushed. With a mandate that has been expanded nine times, over the past 36 years, the Fund has supported the participation of over 3,000 indigenous representatives, including women, men, youth, elders and indigenous persons with disabilities in United Nations human rights mechanisms. The Fund contributed significantly to important developments on indigenous issues from the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) to the establishment of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, expansion of the mandate of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous People, the adoption of the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples Outcome Document and the participation of Indigenous representatives

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in the General Assembly consultations on enhanced participation. Since 2020, the Fund expanded its mandate to support indigenous peoples' participation into the sessions of the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights and the UN Climate Change processes.

In this sense, we have come a long way in opening the doors of the United Nations to indigenous peoples by increasing their participation and their visibility within the organization; by giving indigenous peoples a voice in UN meetings which directly affect their lives. The Fund contributes to increased international awareness of the rights, status, and conditions of indigenous peoples worldwide. Over the years, Madam Chair, we are increasingly seeing the results of the effective engagement of Indigenous Peoples' representatives in the work of UN human rights and other bodies, resulting in specific recommendations for the promotion, respect and fulfilment of Indigenous Peoples' rights.

Madam Chair, I want to highlight that the beneficiaries of the Fund are indigenous representatives who are victims of human rights abuses, indigenous human rights defenders and those who are actively promoting positive change in laws, policies or actions of government or relevant actors in the area of human rights. The Fund supports indigenous representatives who would not be able to attend meetings without the assistance provided by the Fund and those who would be able to contribute to a deeper knowledge of these United Nations mechanisms and bodies of the problems affecting indigenous peoples. By participating in international fora, the grantees of the Fund have been able to use international processes to address human rights violations they face at home, complementing action taken at the domestic level.

In addition to providing financial support to enable the participation of indigenous peoples in United Nations meetings, the Fund allocates resources to build the capacity of indigenous peoples to make them truly effective participants in United Nations meetings. For example, in partnership with partner NGOs, indigenous organizations and the members of the In-

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indigenous-specific UN mechanisms, the Fund regularly organizes human rights training sessions in Geneva and New York, in the margins of the annual sessions of EMRIP and the Permanent Forum, to increase the capacity of indigenous peoples' representatives to effectively participate in human rights mechanisms.

Most recently, the Indigenous Peoples and Minorities Section of OHCHR has developed an e-learning tool on indigenous peoples' rights, in collaboration with the Fund and EMRIP . The course was recently launched and now available in English on OHCHR website at:<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/Pages/E-learningIP.aspx>.

Through this online learning tool, participants will increase their knowledge and understanding of the rights of indigenous peoples, as recognized in the UNDRIP and in other international instruments. The e-learning tool includes explanations on the key provisions of the UNDRIP, real stories and case studies on how indigenous rights are translating into real life situations, possible actions by the United Nations mechanisms, activities and quizzes, tools and resources. Once the user successfully completes the course, s/he will get a certificate from the UN Human Rights Office. The online course is free of charge and will be translated into other languages.

Madam Chair, during 2020, although the UNVFIP allocated a total of USD523,175 to support the participation of 152 indigenous representatives to the various meetings mandated by the Fund, due to COVID-19 pandemic, a very limited number of grantees could travel in the early part of 2020. For example, 4 indigenous representatives could participate to the 84th session of the UN Committee of the Rights of the Child (CRC) that took place from 2-6 March 2020 in Samoa.

This year 2021, in view of the ongoing travel restrictions and unpredictable sanitary situation worldwide, the Board decided to allocate financial resources for participation and travel grants to UN meetings taking place as of September 2021. In this unique context and as per the

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approved Cost Plan for 2021, the Board recommends to allocate US\$141,625 for the travel-related purposes of indigenous representatives to the following UN meetings:

- 15 grants to participate to the sessions of the UN Human Rights Council and its UPR, including the sessions of the UN Treaty Bodies in Geneva;
- 15 grants to participate to the session of UN Forum on Business and Human Rights (UNFoBHR) in Geneva; and
- 21 grants to participate to meetings on the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Madam Chair, the uncertainty about the future contributions continues to impact the delivery of our mandate. The numerous expansions of the mandate of the Fund created new opportunities for indigenous peoples to voice their concerns at the UN, which is extremely positive, but it also means increasing demands for support. The work of the Fund is supported by means of voluntary contributions from Governments, non-governmental organizations and other private or public entities. The Fund would not be in a position to carry out its mandates without sustainable financial support. In this regard and on behalf of the Board of Trustees, I would like to express our deepest gratitude and appreciation to the governments of Australia, Chile, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Holy See, Mexico, Norway, and Peru for their generous contributions to the Voluntary Fund in 2020.

Madam Chair, we must strive to pursue our collective effort towards the full participation of those most directly affected and thus seek to achieve the effective realization of Indigenous Peoples' rights, as enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. With particular reference to paragraph 38 of the Outcome Document of the World Conference, I would like to appeal to all Governments and also private entities to consider supporting the vital work of the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples.

I thank you Madam Chair.