

Human Rights Council  
Half-day discussion on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples  
*Follow-up to the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples*

22 September 2015

Opening statement by Ms. Mona Rishmawi

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Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome our distinguished panellists and moderator to this important discussion on **follow-up to the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples**. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to all the representatives of indigenous peoples who are present here today.

But before I discuss the World Conference, I would like at the outset to register our appreciation for the Human Rights Council's strong and continued support for indigenous peoples' issues. This annual half-day discussion, along with the interactive dialogues with the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, provide significant opportunities to discuss the extent of the realisation of the rights of indigenous peoples around the world.

Let me turn now to the historic event that took place exactly one year ago when the General Assembly held its high-level plenary meeting known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. Member States renewed their commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, with the active participation of indigenous peoples.

States committed themselves to real action in areas that are also very much priorities for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, such as impact of major development projects on indigenous peoples and the participation of indigenous peoples in decision making. Another key commitment was to step up work to combat violence against indigenous

women, who have often been the most excluded among the excluded and frequent targets of multiple discrimination and violence.

The World Conference was indeed a milestone in the United Nations effort to promote and protect the rights of indigenous peoples. However, the real test of the value of its rich Outcome Document is how decisively Member States, indigenous peoples, the United Nations system and other stakeholders will follow it up. Indeed, we all have a role to play in facilitating the implementation of these commitments.

The Outcome Document envisages measures at the national level, including national action plans to implement the Declaration. However, as the High Commissioner recently noted, so far only few States have pursued such plan. We are keen to provide support for such work, which will hopefully be undertaken in an increasing number of countries.

As for the United Nations system, the Outcome Document envisages the development of a System-wide action plan to ensure a coherent approach to achieving the ends of the Declaration. OHCHR is contributing to this work through the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues. Our goal is to draw up a concrete plan, leading to real action, firmly rooted in the principles of the Declaration. We need to make sure that the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is both known and used by UN colleagues in all regions, including at the country level, whether they work on land issues, data collection or women's rights.

The Outcome Document also calls for a review of the mandate of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the Human Rights Council. The Secretary General's recent report on the follow-up to the World Conference outlines various proposals that have already been made, including that the Expert Mechanism prepare an annual global report on the status of implementation of the Declaration, and that it should support follow-up to the recommendations made by human rights mechanisms on indigenous peoples. OHCHR looks forward to supporting the review, with a view to obtaining an outcome that reflects the views of both States and indigenous peoples.

At the World Conference, States also committed themselves to considering possible ways to bolster the participation of indigenous peoples' representatives. This requires facilitating true participation of indigenous representatives, including those not organized as NGOs, in UN meetings and

initiatives. In this respect, the Secretary General has recommended that the President of the General Assembly consider appointing co-facilitators or advisers, including indigenous representatives, to lead an open-ended consultation process on indigenous peoples' participation at the United Nations. I would also like to highlight the role that the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples plays in supporting such participation. It has helped some 2000 indigenous representatives to raise their concerns and pursue dialogue at the meetings of indigenous mechanisms, human rights treaty bodies and the Human Rights Council, including at this session. This year, we are marking the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this significant fund, including through a photo exhibition "Empowered peoples, living cultures", which will be opened outside Room XX today at 6PM. I hope many of you will join us there.

It is crucial for the United Nations to open its doors even wider for indigenous peoples and strengthen efforts to involve indigenous peoples in all international initiatives that affect them. This must include not only indigenous specific work, but also more general key initiatives, such as the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Enhancing indigenous peoples' participation also requires firm measures to end the harassment and intimidation that too many indigenous peoples continue face as a reprisal for their legitimate defence of human rights.

The panel today will enable us to hear different perspectives on these and other aspects of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. I am certain that today's discussions will contribute to a deeper understanding of how States, indigenous peoples and the international community can work together to ensure that the commitments undertaken at the World Conference become a reality.

Thank you.