

**Report on the sixteenth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
(UNPFII)
“The 10th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”
(UNDRIP)**

The UNPFII took place 24 April – 5 May, 2017 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City. More than a thousand participants from organizations and institutions of indigenous peoples, joined by related representatives from NGOs, human rights institutes, embassies and the United Nations, gathered in New York. The Special Theme: “Tenth Anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: measures taken to implement the Declaration”.

The anniversary comes at a crucial moment when efforts to roll out the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) and the implementation of the Paris agreement on climate change are expected to gain momentum. It is a time for reflection and action on how indigenous and tribal peoples’ rights, aspirations and contribution can become an integral part of national development strategies and plans.

The Declaration is an unprecedented global commitment which has raised awareness and visibility of indigenous peoples and their concerns at the international, regional and national levels. It has helped to empower indigenous peoples to claim their rights and the global agendas on development and climate change. The Declaration has also helped to increase attention to the discrimination and exclusion faced by so many indigenous women and persons with disabilities. Since the Declaration’s adoption, three additional countries have ratified the convention No 169 – those countries are Spain, Nepal and Nicaragua.

While some progress has been made since the Declaration’s adoption, most indigenous peoples continue to suffer disproportionately from extreme poverty, social marginalization, systematic discrimination, and structural barriers to accessing healthcare and education. In Kenya, there have been many citings of people being evicted from their ancestral lands. The Global Indigenous Peace Caucus spoke of the lack of monitoring systems for land and water rights. Bangladesh spoke of inhumane torture and land grabbing. They have encouraged the government to address ending cultural impunity. Rightful keepers of coastal waters in New Zealand continue to experience drilling violations – what they call “ocean abuse.”

Canadian indigenous peoples have petitioned the government to develop action plans for the rights of indigenous peoples. This process will take some time to develop because the government of Canada historically has been remiss in acknowledging the abuses of the indigenous peoples. There are over 70 million indigenous peoples in Indonesia. Today, they continue to face injustices that are clearly against the rights noted in their 1945 constitution. The Indonesian government has been asked to end these violations and prepare a comprehensive program on human rights for indigenous peoples. In the interest of upholding human rights, the cultural diversity and diverse needs of indigenous peoples must be taken into account and protected by the law, the public, and the government. Additionally, the cultural identity of indigenous peoples, including their land rights, must be upheld.

The Permanent Forum reviewed the six mandated areas of the UNPFII in an effort to enforce the commitment states made under the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) to protect their human rights and promote gender equality.

The six mandates areas, which include economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights, emphasize the most urgent areas for development. The Forum emphasized the economic disparity in indigenous communities and how limited wealth and resources can limit their ability to fully realize their human rights and human dignity. In order to overcome these disparities, the Forum emphasized the need to put forth governmental policies and plans that can advance the economic development of indigenous populations.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were discussed in conjunction with the mandated areas to ensure that indigenous communities are not left behind in the fight for equality. Sustainability and the environment as well as gender equality were the key issues concerning indigenous peoples and their connection to Mother Earth. Due to ill-conceived programs, such as hydraulic fracturing, there is a lack of water resources for Indigenous Peoples. The end result is forced migration for many. Torture, even death, is very much a part of some indigenous communities. The implementation of the SDGs would further assist in the protection of indigenous land rights and protections of their most valued resources. Additionally, the full realization of the SDGs would assist in reducing the vulnerability of indigenous women and families who are denied of their rights to security and resources.

Some tribal communities claim that proposed pipelines, which climate activists portray as a sequel to Keystone XL, could threaten their sole water source and that, more importantly, they were not consulted before the pipeline was approved, which will likely destroy Native burial sites and sacred places.

Finally, Land is Life was founded at the World Conference of Indigenous Peoples on Territories, Environment and Development in May 1992. It provides direct support to the most overlooked Indigenous Communities.

In addition to the mandated areas, indigenous populations discussed other unmet goals of UNDRIP. While some governments referred to nationally sanctioned action plans in their attempts to increase the self-determination of their indigenous populations, others failed to fully address what policies they have implemented that have positively impacted indigenous peoples with regard to their safety and their right to free, prior and informed consent. For example, the National Human Rights Commission in Thailand underlined the government's failure to define "indigenous", as their lack of initiative in defining these groups has only further marginalized them in their effort to publically participate or obtain access to land titles.

Anglican Communion Office at the United Nations
Rachel Chardon and Rachel Jimenez