

## HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 51<sup>st</sup> SESSION

### Annual half-day panel discussion on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, on the theme “Impact of social and economic recovery plans in the COVID-19 context on Indigenous Peoples, with a special focus on food security”

28 September 2022

In her opening remarks, **Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights**, highlighted that COVID-19 has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities for Indigenous Peoples and remarked on the importance of the participation of Indigenous Peoples, including women, in the decision-making processes of economic and social recovery plans. In particular, she emphasised that Indigenous Peoples should be included and consulted in recovery plans regarding specificities on their individual and collective right to adequate food and to food security. She further mentioned that food insecurity has been aggravated by the denial of Indigenous land rights, the lack of respect for the right to self-determination in relation to Indigenous territories and the disruption of local and traditional economies. Ms. Brands Kehris stated that the OHCHR mainstreams human rights in UN agencies’ work and programmes to promote the strengthening of sustainable food systems, supports Indigenous Peoples in claiming the right to food and advocates for Indigenous Peoples’ effective and meaningful participation and leadership in COVID-19 response and mitigation strategies. Furthermore, she said that there are 31 OHCHR’s Senior Indigenous Fellows deployed in field presences playing important roles in supporting the enjoyment of the right to food and food systems as it applies to Indigenous Peoples. These Fellows are valuable resources in supporting States in ensuring Indigenous Peoples’ right to participate in decision-making processes that affect them.

**Mr. Binota Moy Dhamai, Chair of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**, highlighted that since the outbreak of COVID-19, numerous reports have attested to its disproportionate impact on Indigenous Peoples globally exposing the pre-existing structural inequalities. During the 2020 regional meetings, the Mechanism concluded that COVID-19 has affected the traditional ways of life of Indigenous Peoples, and their food security. This meeting highlighted that: i) measures limiting movement disrupted the ability of Indigenous Peoples to conduct traditional subsistence activities; ii) the virus had a negative impact on the food security of Indigenous Peoples, especially among low-income families; iii) pandemic recovery plans could directly affect natural resources; and iv) the importance of self-determination as a foundational right. Additionally, the Expert Mechanism’s main recommendations recognised that: i) recovery efforts should address the underlying structural inequalities that have exacerbated the impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples; ii) States should collect disaggregated data on Indigenous Peoples and ensure the use of such data to plan inclusive and culturally appropriate responses to the pandemic and in all public policies; iii) Indigenous Peoples should be actively engaged in all steps of the recovery plans; and iv) socioeconomic recovery initiatives require the concerted efforts of all stakeholders. Finally, the Expert Mechanism called upon States to maintain a sustained dialogue with Indigenous Peoples, achieve commitment and strengthen partnerships.

**Mr. José Francisco Calí Tzay, Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples**, expressed the need to assess and promote Indigenous Peoples’ rights linked to the development and implementation of the social and economic recovery plans including food security. He highlighted that the protection of Indigenous territories is central to the recovery as it promotes food security and sustainable livelihoods, increasing resilience in the face of future pandemics. He expressed concern over the sharp rise in illegal deforestation, incursions, land grabbing and violence with little state oversight or redress. He said that the lack of protection of indigenous lands has led to deforestation, violence, killings, resource extraction, food insecurity, pollution and forced evictions of Indigenous

Peoples. He further mentioned that in many states the enforcement of COVID-19 recovery plans is being used to strengthen authoritarian, militarised responses criminalizing the Indigenous human rights defenders and restricting peaceful protests. He stated that without securing the land rights of Indigenous Peoples, violent displacement and forced eviction in the name of development and post-pandemic economic and social recovery will continue. He specified that negotiations by world leaders in Montreal in December 2022 will be crucial for the rights of Indigenous Peoples. He also remarked that Indigenous initiatives need to get support from the state to recover from COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, Mr. Calí Tzay expressed that the COVID-19 social and economic responses need to be whole-of-government and whole-of-society responses.

**Mr. Yon Fernández-de-Larrinoa, Head of the Indigenous Peoples Unit, Partnerships and United Nations Collaboration Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations**, focused on explaining why the right to food is more important than ever and why land, territories, and natural resources are the essences of Indigenous Peoples' right to food. He mentioned that Indigenous Peoples have been facing years of invisibility, inequality, marginalization, discrimination, displacement, violence, and pressures from extractive industries and intensive agriculture. Furthermore, he said that the systematic lack of recognition of their rights places them at a greater risk of suffering the health and socio-economic effects of the pandemic. He also expressed that scientists' recognition of Indigenous Peoples' food and knowledge systems are game changers for sustainability and resilience. This allowed countries and Indigenous Peoples to create a Coalition to be launched in October where the collective work by Indigenous Peoples, countries, Universities, and UN organizations can take place. He also remarked that to preserve biodiversity and address the climate crisis it is necessary to work with Indigenous Peoples at the centre, in supporting Indigenous Peoples' food and knowledge systems with improved policies and programmes. Biocentric efforts are more needed now than ever when looking at the effects that toxins and pollutants are having on earth's ecosystems. He highlighted that without land, Indigenous Peoples cannot access their right to food. He also gave specific relevance to Indigenous women.

**Ms. Myrna Cunningham, First Vice-President of the Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean (FILAC)**, stressed the need to change the prevailing production model and take action on key issues such as climate change and global warming. In this process, the voice and vision of Indigenous Peoples are fundamental since COVID-19 corroborated they hold the key to a transformative recovery based on their knowledge, their collective conscience, and their cosmivision. She also highlighted all the actions deployed by them during COVID-19 to control it and mitigate its effects. These included, among others: traditional medicine systems, gathering information on virus infections, isolation and income control, etc. Regarding actions related to food security, she remarked on all the initiatives in Chile, Bolivia, Colombia, and Belize carried out by Indigenous Peoples to guarantee sustainable and equitable access to food. She said it is necessary that recovery strategies place at the centre the strengthening of ancestral food systems. This is only possible if, at the same time, the necessary measures are taken to protect and consolidate Indigenous territories and lands. Small producers and local economies must also be given special consideration as well as Indigenous youth and women. She also said it is essential to guarantee their participation at all levels of decision-making processes. She listed all the recommendations that resulted from the Food Systems Summit through the Indigenous Youth and Women's dialogues. These included, among others, promoting the exchange of experiences and revaluing local production. She mentioned it is essential to follow up on the outcomes of the Summit so that they do not remain just good intentions or measured achievements. Finally, she encouraged organisations, UN agencies, states and cooperation partners to support small producers through initiatives such as those of FILAC.

#### Interactive dialogue

The majority of the countries and state organisations, including *the EU, Guyana, Sweden (on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries), South Africa, Bolivia*, and the *U.S.*, expressed concern about the

disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current food crisis on Indigenous Peoples, particularly women and girls. They also highlighted that Indigenous Peoples themselves also possess valuable solutions for tackling global food insecurity and that to achieve successful COVID-19 responses and recovery measures it is crucial they are included and can participate in the development of those measures in a meaningful way. **Sweden (on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries)** also condemned reports of threats, violence and attacks on Indigenous human rights defenders and the situation for many Indigenous women and girls, Indigenous LGBTIQ persons and Indigenous persons with disabilities who are further exposed as they face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

**Namibia** noted the importance of mainstreaming gender equality into national policies and programmes aimed at addressing food security, Indigenous women are leaders in food production in our rural communities. **The Russian Federation** highlighted the efforts the country has made to provide medical, social and other assistance to representatives of Indigenous Peoples living in remote and hard-to-reach places, leading a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle. **Colombia** remarked that it is essential to integrate Indigenous Peoples, peasants and rural women in the design and implementation of recovery plans, as their contribution is fundamental for the production of nutrients and for the care of the land, water and biodiversity. **China** condemned the high unemployment rates of Native Americans in the **U.S.**, especially in **Alaska**, as these rates are much higher than those of other groups. China said Native Americans lack medical services and access to food security. In addition, it mentioned that **Canada** does not protect the rights of Indigenous children and called upon states to accelerate their implementation of the UN declaration on Indigenous Peoples.

Many **NGOs** said it is essential to protect the worldview of Indigenous Peoples of food systems, particularly in post-pandemic recovery plans. One NGO highlighted that there are language barriers that become obstacles to the effective participation of Indigenous Peoples in recovery plans. In addition, it condemned the Russia-Ukraine conflict for exacerbating the food security crisis. Other NGOs mentioned the importance of the right to quality education for Indigenous children and access to quality health care, water and sanitation systems. Specific country situations were mentioned, including in:

- **Guatemala:** The human right to adequate food for Indigenous Peoples is affected due to institutional weakening and socio-economic impacts derived from discriminatory policies that benefit agro-industrial companies.
- **Brazil:** The Brazilian state must immediately reinstate Indigenous Peoples' healthcare policy and to investigate its actions in relation to Indigenous Peoples.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (21 country delegations):

*Azerbaijan, Guyana, Mexico (on behalf of a group of countries), Sweden (on behalf of the Nordic Baltic countries), European Union, Germany, Australia, Brazil, Russian Federation, Peru, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Colombia, Bolivia, Namibia, Cambodia, United States of America, Spain, Malaysia, Nepal, South Africa, China.*

NGOs and other observers that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (7):

*UN Women, United Nations Population Fund (UNPF), Franciscans International, Conselho Indigenista Missionário (CIMI), Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, International Organization for the Right to Education and Freedom of Education (OIEL), Africa Culture Internationale.*

To watch the full meeting refer to [UN Web TV](#).