

**Statement by** [**Mr. Jose Francisco Cali**](https://www.iucncongress2020.org/programme/speakers/jose-francisco-cali-tzay) **Tzay,**

**United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

**at Stockholm 50+**

**Side event on “Coming together for healthy people and a healthy planet: the UN system’s commitment to advancing the human right to a healthy environment”**

Stockholm, 2 June 2022

Thank you for inviting me to speak here today. As part of my mandate from the Human Rights Council, I have a global mandate to monitor alleged violations of the human rights of indigenous peoples, and to formulate recommendations to prevent and remedy such violations. Since 2019, my mandate is also specifically tasked to research and dialogue with stakeholders on the consequences of climate change on indigenous peoples and effective measures to address this.

Indigenous peoples are disproportionately vulnerable to climate change because many depend on ecosystems and natural resources for their basic needs and livelihoods. Extreme weather events, such as rising sea levels, floods, droughts, heat waves, wildfires and cyclones are affecting their lands at a disconcerting rate. Global warming changes animal migration routes, reduces biodiversity, causes saltwater inundations, destroys crops, results in food insecurity and increases disease risks.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Traditional indigenous territories encompass over 20 per cent of the world’s land surface and overlap with areas that hold around 80 per cent of the planet’s biodiversity. The correlation between secure indigenous land tenure and effective conservation outcomes is well documented.[[2]](#footnote-2) Indigenous peoples have centuries-long traditions of safeguarding the environment and biodiversity for future generations and their knowledge is vital for the sustainable management of natural resources and conservation. In other words, indigenous peoples are resilient actors who are uniquely positioned to provide key advice on climate change action and conservation and the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals 13, 14 and 15.

Despite international commitments to protect indigenous peoples’ rights, in practice their rights and knowledge continue to be denied. In many countries, the failure to protect indigenous peoples’ land rights and their participation in the management of protected areas are key factors that continue to undermine indigenous peoples’ important role in preserving biological diversity.

The escalating killings of environmentalists, among them many indigenous leaders, further underlines the urgency that measures be taken to protect indigenous lands from land-grabbing threats, such as extractive industries, the expansion of agribusiness, infrastructure and tourism projects.

I wish to underline that in order to carry out a human rights-based approach to conservation and climate change action, measures must be undertaken in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Article 29 asserts the right of indigenous peoples to the conservation and protection of the environment and their lands, territories and resources.

There must also be recognition that indigenous peoples’ rights are interrelated. This includes recognition of their right to self-determination, development and participation and of the obligation to seek the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and resources.

I urge the United Nations, States and conservation organisations to take a more proactive stance in ensuring a human rights-based approach of ‘do no harm’ and of respect for human rights standards, notably the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

It is indispensable that indigenous peoples be able to participate effectively in decision-making processes which clearly affect their rights and the future of their lands and resources. Their vital role in conserving biodiversity is important for us all.

I thank you for your attention and look forward to our discussion.

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1. Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, A/HRC/36/46 (2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. IPBES, *Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services*, IPBES/7/10/Add.1 (2019); World Resources Institute and Rights and Resources Initiative, *Securing Rights, Combating Climate Change: How Strengthening Community Forest Rights Mitigates Climate Change* (2014); Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, A/71/229 (2016) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)