

17th Session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Item 8: Panel discussion on the rights of Indigenous Peoples in post-conflict situations and peace negotiation, agreement, and accords

Monday 8 July 2024

Palais des Nations

Statement by the Chair, UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Ms Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim

Distinguished Chair, Members of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,
Distinguished delegations,
Indigenous brothers and sisters,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to address the 17th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the newly elected Chair of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

First of all, I would like to thank the EMRIP members and staff of the secretariat for the excellent organization of this session, as well as all the representatives of Indigenous Peoples present here today, many of whom have traveled long distances to participate in this session.

From the perspective of Indigenous Peoples, conflicts often stem from our disconnect with nature, and with the loss of our relationship to our land. Conflicts tend to emerge from issues related to the land, whether it is from the exploitation of lands for mining, logging or agriculture, or from the degradation of ecosystems and the increasing shortages of natural resources due to climate change.

My home in the Sahel region has been particularly affected by the destructive impact of violent conflicts, triggered by climate change. As a pastoralist community, my Mbororo People are suffering from drought and desertification, food insecurity, and violent clashes between communities trying to get access to water and fertile land. The Lake Chad basin has already lost

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90 per cent of its water, and conflicts have arisen as communities fight to access and share the remaining water resources.

The path towards peace and reconciliation is not just about resolving a particular conflict, but it also means reconciliation with Mother Earth. It is just as important in any peace agreement to restore harmony with nature, and with our lands. And since Indigenous Peoples live in harmony with their environment, and have specific scientific and technical knowledge relating to their local environment, including our perspectives and voices in peace negotiations is vital.

For Indigenous Peoples, our cosmovisions, our justice systems and our spiritual beliefs inform our understanding of the world. We hold a deep respect for the natural world, the animals, the plants, the waters and lands, and we live in peace and harmony with them. Therefore, it is important to recognize our unique knowledge systems and ways of living, and peace processes, accords and agreements need to respect and meaningfully incorporate Indigenous Peoples' perspectives and understand our cosmovisions.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is very clear on the rights of Indigenous Peoples in relation to post-conflict situations. It states that Indigenous Peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters that would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves. This includes in peace negotiations. States must also cooperate in good faith with Indigenous Peoples to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting any measures or agreements that may affect them.

The UNDRIP can be an invaluable tool in post-conflict situations with Indigenous Peoples present, and it should always be at the forefront of our minds when negotiations peace agreements and accords, as it is the key instrument for protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples and for ultimately achievement a framework of justice, reconciliation and respect.

Each year, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs organizes an international expert group meeting on a specific topic relevant to Indigenous Peoples, proposed by the Members of

the Permanent Forum. Recognising the vital importance of peace and reconciliation, in recent years the Permanent Forum has prioritized this topic in its Expert Group Meetings.

In 2022, the Expert Group Meeting was held on the topic of Truth, transitional justice and reconciliation processes. In 2019, the EGM focused on Peace, justice and strong institutions: the role of IPs in implementing SDG 16. Sustainable Development Goal 16.

Both sessions highlighted the many obstacles to the implementation of post conflict agreements and accords. Sometimes political and economic interests that benefit from conflicts get in the way. Sometimes agreements are not negotiated in good faith by Member States. And more often than not, Indigenous Peoples lack the legal and financial resources to make their voices and perspectives heard.

Among the key lessons learned during these meetings was that Indigenous Peoples' own laws and customs should be integrated into transitional justice processes by using their own concepts of justice and healing to validate their personal experiences.

In dialogues and discussions, Indigenous Peoples must be placed on an equal footing with other stakeholders. And importantly, diversity should be seen as something positive, and not as an obstacle for effective dialogue.

Another important aspect of peace and reconciliation is around missing and disappeared persons. The disappearance of Indigenous Peoples, in particular Indigenous women and girls, is a global phenomenon with far reaching consequences. In post-conflict situations, the cycle of pain can only be broken when the truth is uncovered. For many, finding out the truth about missing Indigenous persons is an integral aspect of reconciliation.

With many persistent conflicts across the globe, the Permanent Forum urgently calls upon Member States to focus on ways to achieve peace by utilizing Indigenous Peoples as peacebuilders. Here, Indigenous women peacebuilders are crucial – they often bear the brunt of the devastating effects of wars and conflict and suffer disproportionately from sexual violence. They have an acute understanding of their societies, their environments, and therefore know exactly what is needed to resolve a conflict and ensure a lasting peace. Indigenous women must

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therefore have a seat at the table in drafting and negotiating peace agreements.

On 19 June 2023, the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened an ambassadorial-level meeting on Indigenous Peoples, Peace and Reconciliation in Canada, Colombia and Norway. The meeting focused on sharing good practices and challenges of peace and reconciliation processes and promoting Indigenous voices in peacebuilding in those countries. The UNPFII stressed the need to promote the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in peacebuilding efforts inviting States to review, jointly with Indigenous Peoples, legal frameworks and conflict prevention initiatives, with the aim of better recognizing the rights of Indigenous Peoples and their institutions.

It is also important that the UN System addresses the situation of Indigenous Peoples as an urgent matter. The Permanent Forum in its most recent report, again called on the UN Security Council to address conflicts on Indigenous lands and territories in its meetings under the peace and security agenda, with the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples.

I look forward to hearing from the other panel members and speakers from the floor on this topic. It is important to hear both about examples of good practice of the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in peace negotiations, as well as to understand the barriers that prevent Indigenous Peoples from participating meaningfully in post-conflict discussions.

Because peace agreements should belong to all of us.

Thank you very much.