

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
16<sup>th</sup> Session  
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New York

**STATEMENT BY THE PASSIONIST INTERNATIONAL**

**AGENDA ITEM 12 – Future Work of the Permanent Forum and Emerging Issues**

Madam Chair, the Passionists International would like to congratulate you for your very disciplined handling of the entire session these past few days and as we now engage in discussion on the future direction of the work of the Permanent Forum, please allow us to suggest that at its next session, the Permanent Forum tackle the possible implications of synthetic biology not only on the way this will affect how indigenous peoples carry out their livelihoods that are closely interlinked with the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity but more importantly on the socio-cultural and ethical dimensions of such technology.

Synthetic biology is a very new technology that may have implications on how we deal with life-forms, and, as it combines the design, redesign, manufacture and/or modification of genetic materials, living organisms and biological systems, for us, this sounds like humans beings playing the role of God and growing in their ability to improve and modify life, allowing, for example, farmers to kill weeds but not their crops, and yet there is considerable disagreement over the impact of synthetic biology on biodiversity, wildlife and the livelihoods of indigenous peoples, including concerns regarding their health, esp. of indigenous women and children.

The Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, in its general comment No. 12 (1999) on the right to adequate food, substantiates the right to adequate food, stating that it must not be construed in a narrow or restrictive sense, and declaring that adequacy denotes not just quantity but also quality.

Given the potentially severe, negative impact of the use of synthetic biology on people and the planet, the Permanent Forum may also want to make recommendations regarding this issue in relation to an international legally binding instrument to regulate the activities of transnational corporations who will inevitably take steps in mainstreaming these technologies in the near-term would be important to strengthen the international accountability framework.

Thank you Madam Chair.