

· Nonviolent Radical Party, Transnational and Transparty
United Nations Indigenous Forum 16th Session
Agenda Item 16- SDG #12
By Abdirahman Mahdi
UN Headquarters, New York

Madame Chairwoman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I take the floor today on behalf of the Nonviolent Radical Party, Transnational and Transparty and our partner organisation, the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization. The representatives of the Nonviolent Radical Party have left New York, delegating me to read this statement on their behalf.

Indigenous peoples in many parts of the world continue to lose control over lands that are vital to their communities, primarily because the economic benefits of land-grabbing are often given priority over the guarantee of indigenous peoples' land rights. The development of large-scale and profit-oriented infrastructures, often overlooking the principle of free, prior and informed consent, constitutes a real environmental stressor causing irreversible damage to the ecosystems indigenous peoples depend on. In addition, oil exploration and agribusiness are displacing thousands across the globe, with no prospect of alternative means of survival. Land ownership policies can also make it incredibly difficult for some to hold on to their own land, forcing them to shifts in their economic statuses, from land-owners to underpaid manual labourers.

Indigenous' religious beliefs largely continue to be seen as threats to States' national unities, or even security. Religious leaders are regularly arrested, sacred lands are seized and populations are prevented from practising their religions freely and peacefully.

As has already been stressed during this Forum, indigenous women are subjected to a double discrimination. They are the first victims of State-sponsored persecution, finding themselves confronted to issues of rape and other forms of sexual violence, especially during armed conflicts. They also find themselves to be particularly vulnerable within societies based on systems of oppression such as slavery.

The vulnerability of the world's indigenous is also particularly visible when it comes to health. Difficult geopolitical contexts, along with the consequences of climate change, have disastrous consequences on the indigenous peoples' health in many regions. States' disrespect for human rights can further exacerbate widespread diseases such as undernutrition or cholera in such contexts, in particular when the authorities impose trade embargoes or restrictions on the freedom of movement for the populations.

The disappearance of indigenous languages and knowledge is another area of great concern. It is in itself a tragic loss of culture, let alone a failure to ensure indigenous peoples' ability to practise their right to language. Valuable survival skills developed by indigenous peoples for millennia are similarly neglected and in danger of disappearing.

Despite having given a rather pessimistic overview of the situation of indigenous rights across the world, we continue to believe that positive change has occurred both in legislation and attitudes and that this progress needs to be further developed through the SDG. Hence, as we all gather here on the occasion of the 16th session of this Forum, we must also re-gather our strength and conviction that, together, we can bring States, the private sector and international institutions to better respect the rights of indigenous peoples.

Thank you.