

STATEMENT

68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly - Third Committee



International
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STATEMENT BY

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69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly - Third Committee
Agenda Item 65: Rights of indigenous peoples

Madame Chair,

It is befitting and historically important that the 69th Session of the UN General Assembly, with the theme of “Delivering on and implementing a transformative post-2015 development agenda”, included the convening of the first World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in its opening plenary. With the successful adoption of a call to action from this gathering, the international community now has a concrete road map for increasing efforts to strengthen the realization of the rights of more than 370 million indigenous people worldwide.

The ILO congratulates the Presidents of the 68th and 69th Session of the General Assembly, and their team’s, as well as the extraordinary work of the Member States and the UN Permanent Forum to deliver such a successful conference. Most notably, the energy, enthusiasm and engagement of indigenous peoples’ representatives in this process ensured a fruitful participatory approach with an impressive level of transparency.

Having a voice on issues directly affecting ones’ future is the essence of decent work and we look forward to continuing this work with indigenous peoples and their representatives. With a call in the outcome document for the rights of indigenous peoples to be included in the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda, we believe that our collaboration will help move this agenda forward.

The ILO’s Convention on Indigenous Peoples Rights (No. 169) was the first binding international convention to recognise the aspirations of indigenous peoples “to exercise control over their own institutions, ways of life and economic development”. The Convention, along with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, forms the a main pillars of the international framework for indigenous peoples’ rights.

It is our sincere hope that the new outcome document and Post-2015 discussions will provide further guidance and impetus for concrete actions to further indigenous peoples' rights. Our efforts here and on a range of relevant economic and social issues are focused on an inclusive, equitable and sustainable development agenda to ensure the full realization of rights and decent work for all women and men.

The ILO welcomes the call for Member States to ratify Convention No. 169, in consultation with indigenous peoples and workers' and employers' organizations. As we have heard from Heads of State and Governments during the opening General Debate, there is tremendous momentum internationally for the protection of rights and the rule of law. We are hopeful that the international community will help reinforce this legal framework and make widespread ratification of the Convention on Indigenous Peoples – especially in Europe, Asia and Africa – possible.

Madame Chair,

In addition to continued political will, it is essential to establish and support effective mechanisms for consultation and participation of indigenous peoples to ensure full respect of their rights at the national and regional levels. Ensuring well-functioning institutions that have the necessary capacity, will help the millions of aspirants for a better life emerge from the shadows of neglect and provide them with a real opportunity for economic and social empowerment.

Indigenous peoples face enormous and rapid socio-economic changes to their livelihoods, often related to loss of land and access to natural resources and the impact of climate change. The lack of access to land and other resources, and to basic social services, often means that indigenous men and women, particularly youths, have no other choice than to migrate, both within countries and internationally. For indigenous women, they are increasingly migrating for domestic work which is often hidden from public view and carries the potential of higher levels of violence and exploitation.

Working in casual jobs or in the informal economy, where pay is low and labour law coverage and compliance is often weak, indigenous peoples are highly vulnerable to rights violations, income and employment insecurity and a lack of social protection. As a result, indigenous women and men and their communities risk remaining trapped in a cycle of poverty, discrimination and exploitation.

Another serious issue is the lack of access to education and vocational training developed and implemented in cooperation with indigenous peoples that is in line with their cultures and needs. This problem, which particularly affects girls, places indigenous youths in a severely disadvantaged position in the labour market.

In addressing the situation of indigenous women, the outcome document calls for measures that will ensure the “full and effective participation of indigenous women in decision-making processes at all levels and in all areas and eliminate barriers to their participation in political,

economic, social and cultural life.” The ILO strongly supports social dialogue and women’s empowerment as an important way to achieve effective outcomes and maintain an inclusive and participatory approach for development.

There is an urgent need to support indigenous knowledge, skills and occupations so they can be harnessed for their own social and economic development. This knowledge is an invaluable asset that can provide a basis for the creation of enterprises and cooperatives. Indigenous communities can combine traditional livelihood strategies with new economic activities to improve their economic and social conditions, including through vocational training and access to decent work and social protection.

The ILO tripartite constituents can play an important role in the promotion and protection of indigenous peoples’ rights, including their right to consultation and participation. Our social partners can provide training and essential skills development to help build their capacities and improve their effectiveness. In a recent development, for example, the workers’ movement in Latin America and indigenous peoples adopted a road map for the further strengthening of their alliances.

The ILO looks forward to working with UN partners and indigenous peoples to develop a system-wide action plan as called for by the outcome document, building on the experiences of the UN Indigenous Peoples’ Partnership and to support national efforts to make indigenous peoples’ rights a reality.

Thank you.