



**Statement delivered by Ms. Lauren Flejzor, FAO Liaison Officer,
on behalf of Ms. Sharon Brennen-Haylock,
Director of the FAO Liaison Office to the UN
Item 65: Rights of Indigenous Peoples (20 October 2014)**

*Madame Chair,
Distinguished Delegates,*

FAO's mandate is focused on the eradication of hunger, and on today, the observance of World Food Day at UN Headquarters, we are reminded of the pressing need to achieve a Zero Hunger world. We cannot achieve a world free of hunger without considering the special needs, rights and contributions of Indigenous Peoples. We note the progress made in the Second Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples as explained in the Secretary-General's report on the subject and applaud the recent outcome of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

However, we know that substantial action still needs to be taken to recognize Indigenous Peoples' tenure rights and apply the principle of free, prior, and informed consent. We need to continue to promote Indigenous Peoples' full and effective participation in decisions which affect their lifestyles, lands and territories, including in the governance of tenure.

Global recognition of how fundamental governance of tenure is to ensuring food security is reflected in the **Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests** in the context of national food security (VGGTs), which was approved by the FAO Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in May 2012. The Voluntary Guidelines are the first global soft law instrument on tenure prepared through intergovernmental negotiations with inputs from Indigenous Peoples, civil society, academia, and the private sector.

Relevance of VGGTs for Indigenous Peoples

The Voluntary Guidelines include general principles, among which is the need for States to recognise, respect and safeguard legitimate tenure rights, including those of Indigenous Peoples. Section 9 in particular contains important provisions that recognize Indigenous Peoples' rights and customary tenure systems and acknowledges the social, cultural and spiritual value that land, fisheries and forests have for them. The Guidelines are composed of many sections, all of which are relevant to improving governance of tenure and strengthening tenure rights, and they should therefore be accepted and applied in their entirety.

Implementation of the VGGTs

The application of the Voluntary Guidelines is primarily identified as a responsibility of States, however their success and meaningful impact rely on the contribution and participation of all stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples' representatives.

FAO's global awareness-raising campaign on the Voluntary Guidelines is proving to be very effective. National and regional workshops are being conducted and a number of resource partners, with whom we have very positive, long-standing relationships, are generously contributing to this first phase of implementation.

For instance, in Sierra Leone, FAO and the Government are undertaking an assessment of legislation that needs to be amended to align it with the Voluntary Guidelines. In Liberia, FAO is supporting the Government, local communities and the private sector in applying free, prior and informed consent in cases of land investments.

FAO devotes particular attention in raising the capacity of non-state actors on the use and application of the Voluntary Guidelines. For example we are currently developing a practical manual on how non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, farmers organizations and Indigenous Peoples can utilize the Voluntary Guidelines on Tenure, and we plan to test this manual in eight countries.

Private sector entities such as Coca Cola and Pepsicola have also declared that they will follow the Voluntary Guidelines in their production processes. We look forward to working with non-state actors in building implementation capacity for the Guidelines.

The way forward

Looking ahead, we are currently programming tailor-made, national multi-stakeholder workshops on the governance of tenure in Mongolia, Madagascar, South Africa, Myanmar and Nepal and elsewhere before the end of 2014, and more workshops will follow in 2015. We invite other member states to let FAO know of their interest in convening similar workshops in their countries.

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A fairer world, where hunger, poverty, discrimination and inequality are eradicated, cannot be realized without special consideration of Indigenous Peoples' realities. Their ancestral knowledge encapsulates solutions related to climate change, natural resource management and a variety of sustainable development challenges. At the same time, their poverty and vulnerability calls for specific attention.

As we celebrate the observance of World Food Day today in New York, I take this opportunity to reiterate FAO's will to provide, through the use of its tools and expertise, full technical support to Indigenous Peoples in their struggle to secure access to their lands, territories, natural resources and sacred areas, and to member states to improve governance frameworks in the pursuit of a fairer, food secure world.