



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza  
Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations  
Third Committee of the 70<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly  
**Agenda Item 69: Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

New York, 19 October 2015

Mr. Chair,

The Holy See notes with appreciation the recent Report of the Secretary General on the implementation of the Outcome document of the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly known as the “World Conference on Indigenous Peoples,” which rightly calls for further progress by Member States and the United Nations System in the promotion and protection of the rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as their greater participation at the United Nations.

As we look forward with great hope to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we must not forget that environmental degradation and unsustainable approaches to development that we must counteract are often born from a lack of respect for our neighbor and for our shared responsibility for our common home. We must recover an authentic sense of fraternity and collective responsibility for the wellbeing of our fellow human beings and for the world in which we live if we are to be successful in the Agenda’s full implementation.

For this reason, it is essential not only to increase efforts to promote and protect the human rights, identity, culture and tradition of Indigenous Peoples in the Agenda’s implementation, but also to take into account the traditional wisdom and experience of the Indigenous Peoples as reference points in identifying approaches to preserve and foster their wellbeing and collective interests.

As Pope Francis reminds us in the Encyclical *Laudato Si’*, “it is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners [...] for them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values.”<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Chair,

The 2030 Agenda insists on “leaving no one behind.” This implies giving an active place at the table to those who are marginalized and living in the fringes of our society. As Pope Francis recommended in his Address to the General Assembly on September 25, “To enable these real men and women to escape from extreme poverty, we must allow them to be dignified agents of their own destiny,” as protagonists in their own development and in the development of others. In the case of the Indigenous Peoples, providing them with the opportunity to participate in the Agenda’s implementation will not only help to better ensure that they are not left behind, but also it will provide the International Community with an important perspective on how to make the Agenda as fruitful and beneficial as possible for the Indigenous Peoples.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’*, No. 146.

In particular, Indigenous Peoples have a lot to teach us on how to take care of and love our common home. They are unique in their respect for the environment and for their attention to the needs of their community. Their tradition that spans millennia is characterized by a profound respect for nature as a gift and as a good common to all. For them, it is not simply a matter of moral obligation but common sense to consider future generations when taking from the land or when engaging with national governments for their own development. Rooted in a common history and shared identity, Indigenous Peoples and communities provide an essential counter example to contemporary practices, habits and trends which are often expressions of selfish consumerism and are detrimental to our environment.

Pope Francis recently affirmed that “when [Indigenous Peoples] remain on their land, they themselves care for it best. Nevertheless, in various parts of the world, pressure is being put on them to abandon their homelands to make room for agricultural or mining projects which are undertaken without regard for the degradation of nature and culture.”<sup>2</sup>

In this context, we call on international, national and local policymakers and movers to respect the Indigenous Peoples’ rights to their homelands and their natural resources. My delegation wishes to highlight in particular the importance of just laws to regulate the relationship between indigenous peoples and extractive industries operating in ancestral lands: lands that, in many cases, are also of great spiritual, cultural and environmental significance.

Thus, looking forward toward the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, my delegation wishes to underline once more that the realization of the right to development of the Indigenous Peoples must be as much as possible coherent and harmonious with their specific identity and values. This can only be assured if the indigenous peoples themselves have a say in their own development. Their input in the decision-making process is vital, because the very survival of their identity and heritage could be at stake.

Mr. Chair,

The Holy See wishes to reiterate its commitment towards the integral development of the world’s Indigenous Peoples and reaffirm its conviction of their central role in the work of the United Nations.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.