

**Fiji Statement at the Third Committee General Discussion on Item &0 (a,b) on the Rights of Indigenous Persons, on the report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, 19 October 2015, New York.**

Mr. Chairman,

As this is the first time Fiji is taking the floor, I wish to congratulate you and members of your Bureau on your election. We are confident that with your able stewardship, this committee will be successful this session. I also extend my Government's support to you and members of the Bureau.

Mr. Chairman,

We thank the Special Rapporteur, Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz for her report and commend her for her engagement on important issues affecting indigenous peoples. In particular, Mr. Chairman, the participation of the Special Rapporteur at the 20<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNFCCC Conference of Parties on the impact of climate change on indigenous peoples. Also, as a panellist at the high-level panel on human rights and climate change at the Human Rights Council in March 2015. Fiji encourages the Special Rapporteur to continue to engage on this important issue, which can disproportionately affect indigenous peoples in any community, in particular where indigenous communities live in vulnerable areas in traditional community structures.

Mr. Chairman,

With regard to the thematic focus in the Special Rapporteur's current report on the impact of investment agreements and clause in free trade agreements on indigenous peoples, Fiji can speak from experience that investment clauses in free trade agreements can be particularly onerous on developing countries. The manner in which such clauses have been developed favour the Parties which have large, often multinational companies able to invest, and can detrimentally impact on local

industries, employment and livelihoods in the lesser developed Party. Such impact inevitably is disproportionately felt by the most vulnerable in a country, be it women working in the informal sector, unskilled workers, and indeed on indigenous communities. Fiji is privileged that its indigenous peoples are the majority and well protected under the Constitution, and have access to free education as provided for under the Constitution, enabling them to participate on an informed basis in the workforce and in decisions concerning themselves. Having said that, Fiji also has a large rural and semi-urban population which relies more on subsistence economies, and as consumers such communities, both indigenous and other, can be disproportionately affected by policy decisions made with regard to free trade agreements.

Consultations with local communities, through appropriate government mechanisms, take on an additional importance to ensure that such policy decisions are made on an informed basis, and with the best interests of the national economy in mind. Countries such as Fiji, already vulnerable to external shocks and at risk of marginalisation in the multilateral trading system, must take particular care in entering into free trade agreements with onerous obligations. The Special Rapporteur's report is therefore a timely reminder of this concern as it relates to the rights of indigenous peoples.

Mr. Chairman,

Fiji will continue to engage with the Special Rapporteur on thematic issues related to the rights of indigenous peoples so as to benefit from, and to contribute to, international best practice.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.