

Keynote Address: Indigenous Peoples' Forum in IFAD, 4<sup>th</sup> Global Session, 12-14 February 2019, IFAD Headquarters, Rome, Italy

## **Enhancing and Promoting Indigenous Peoples. Knowledge and Innovations for Climate Resilience and Sustainable Development**

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Mr. Gilbert Hounbo, President of IFAD, Mr. Paul Winters, Members of the Governing Council of IFAD, the Senior Management and staff of IFAD, members of the Indigenous Peoples' Steering Committee, Indigenous representatives, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor for me to speak at this opening plenary of the 4<sup>th</sup> Global Meeting of the Indigenous Peoples' Forum at IFAD. I always look forward to attending this Forum because it represents what can possibly be achieved through a partnership between indigenous peoples and a UN Multilateral Financial Institution. For many of us, indigenous peoples, we started knowing IFAD only in 2001. It has not been that long but many milestones have been achieved between then and now. The theme "Promoting Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge and Innovations for Climate Resilience and Sustainable Development" is so apt as several of the gains achieved by indigenous peoples since the Forum in 2017 speak to this theme.

What I will do today is to walk you through a short history of indigenous peoples in the UN, share briefly what I do as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as it relates to the concerns we are talking about. I will highlight the key gains indigenous peoples achieved in their work at the local, regional and global arenas and the challenges and opportunities for indigenous peoples and identify what IFAD can do to build upon these gains.

Allow me to tell you briefly when and how the indigenous peoples managed to get into the UN. This started during the period of the League of Nations. As early as 1923, Deskaheh, Chief of the Iroquois League, representing the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, went to Geneva to speak before the League of Nations. He was not allowed to do this. Then the Maori religious leader T.W. Ratana also went in 1925 to talk about what is happening with the Waitangi Treaty. Again, he was refused. It was only in 1970s that a huge group of indigenous peoples went to UN in Geneva to get a resolution passed to create a Working Group on Indigenous Populations. The UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations was established in 1982 and it worked on the draft of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This work started in 1985 until we finally got the UN General Assembly to adopt the Declaration in Sept. 13, 2007. The ILO also has adopted in 1957 a Convention 107 on Indigenous and Tribal Populations, which was later revised in 1989 and became ILO Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. Subsequently, we got the UN to establish the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2001), the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2001) and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) under the Human Rights Council.

This long history now includes our history with IFAD which started in 2002 and now here we are in 2019 in the global meeting of the 4<sup>th</sup> Indigenous Peoples' Forum. In 2017 when the UN celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> birthday of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, I spoke

before the General Assembly to share my views on what have been achieved in 10 years. I highlighted as achievements and as good practice, the work done by IFAD. These included the Policy of Engagement with Indigenous Peoples, the Indigenous Peoples' Assistance Facility and the Indigenous Peoples' Forum. I said IFAD was the first and only UN institution which facilitated and institutionalized indigenous peoples' direct engagement with its Governing Council, with its President and Senior Management, through the Indigenous Peoples' Forum and which established a grants facility dedicated to indigenous peoples' projects. So you remain a unique and distinct institution among the various UN bodies, programmes, agencies and funds and I congratulate you for this.

While we celebrate the gains we have achieved, we should not lose track of the fact that indigenous peoples in many parts of the world are still discriminated against and still remain victims of the worst forms of impunity and criminalization. I thank the President for reminding us of these realities in his opening remarks. Leaders and activists have sacrificed their lives in their struggles to assert and claim their basic human rights. I will talk about this more later.

I read all the documents sent to us for this meeting, so my views are basically informed by these reports and own my observations and findings in doing my mandate as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous peoples. The report IFAD did for the Bienium 2017-2018 mentioned that IFAD provided 22 loans and grants with direct IFAD contribution of US\$ 205 million, benefitting indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities. This is a significant amount of resources, so it will be interesting to analyze and understand the impact of these projects on indigenous peoples in the countries where these projects have been implemented. It is also important to know how the indigenous peoples have participated in the formulation of these loans and grants and in the implementation and evaluation processes.

I have visited several countries and many communities where indigenous peoples live. I did not have the opportunity to look into the IFAD projects but in some country visits I met with some IFAD staff. I also receive communications from indigenous peoples on specific problems they face and I make thematic reports on burning issues which I think should be addressed. The countries I visited last year were Guatemala and Ecuador. My thematic reports last year were on the criminalization of indigenous peoples and on indigenous governance, which is an introductory I presented my country and thematic reports before the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly and these can be accessed in my website, <https://www.unsr.vtaulicorpuz.org>. I also did a thematic report on climate change finances and indigenous peoples in 2017 and took part in some climate change processes and the High Level Political Forum of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We are living in a world threatened by catastrophic climate change which threatens human civilization and our very existence. The IPCC 2018 report has stated that we only have a window of 12 years for global warming to be kept to a maximum of 1.5 C, and if we cannot do this, the risks of drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people will increase. It further stated that "rapid and far-reaching" transitions in land, energy, industry, buildings, transport, and cities have to be done within these 12 years. With this warning, we wonder whether we as human beings are capable of addressing this emergency.

Indigenous peoples, who have the smallest contribution to this climate change problem, have addressed this problem very seriously because they are the ones in the forefront of the most adverse impacts. But also more importantly they believe they have the experiences and knowledge systems which can help address climate change. This is why they insist on using, sharing and transmitting their traditional knowledge to protect their ecosystems which are crucial for resilience and adaptation. They also persist in their actions and advocacies from the local, regional and up to the global level. At the local levels they are the ones mainly protecting and sustainably using their forest and marine ecosystems. There are now many evidences emerging from researches showing that there is an overlap between forests which are better kept with territories of indigenous peoples where their rights to their lands, territories and resources are respected. These findings are now being used to show direct links between the respect for human rights of indigenous peoples and effective climate change actions.

In 2018 at the UNFCCC, the International Indigenous Peoples' Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC) worked with governments like Bolivia, Ecuador, Fiji, Norway, amongst others, to get a COP 24 Decision passed which established a mechanism which will operationalize the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform for Sharing Traditional Knowledge on Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation (LCIP). This mechanism is called the Facilitative Working Group which will be composed of 7 indigenous peoples' representative, 5 parties representing the 5 UN regions, one party from the Small Island States and one representing the Least Developed Countries. In addition to the decision on the REDD+ Safeguards in the COP 16 in Cancun which referred to the need to respect indigenous peoples' rights and knowledge, the LCIP is another major achievement of indigenous peoples' advocacy. The decision of the Paris Agreement to establish the LCIP and the COP 24 Decision are key steps in the recognition of the importance of the knowledge systems of indigenous peoples and local communities in addressing climate change. These decisions are major steps in getting Environmental Conventions to recognize the need to protect and respect human rights of indigenous peoples when climate change measures are being undertaken.

There will be lots of work needed to make the LCIP Traditional Knowledge Sharing Platform work. Additional research and documentation of the traditional knowledge systems of indigenous peoples need to be done. At the national level, the Parties should ensure participation of indigenous peoples when they make their Nationally Determined Contributions. Resources should be provided to indigenous peoples to further enhance their traditional knowledge, innovations and practices related to climate change mitigation and adaptation. I can see IFAD playing important roles in all these.

At the Green Climate Fund Board meetings, the small indigenous team led by my colleagues in Tebtebba, worked very hard to get the Board to adopt the Indigenous Peoples' Policy. Indigenous peoples are now in the process of working together with accredited entities of the Green Climate Fund so they can have access to the Fund to strengthen further their contributions in mitigating climate change and to reinforce their adaptation measures. They are now trying to explore with IFAD, whether there is a possibility for collaboration at the global, regional and local levels. At the local levels we have some indigenous organizations who are in discussions with IFAD, the UNDP and FAO. Globally, the indigenous peoples have developed their Global

Framework for Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation which lays the foundation for their partnership with multilateral organizations like IFAD.

The Indigenous Peoples' Major Group which is the one participating in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has developed a partnership which will support indigenous peoples' in setting up renewable energy projects. This is called the Right Energy Partnership. There are many opportunities in the work around SDGs which should lead to partnerships between indigenous peoples and IFAD.

Having mentioned some of the actions taken by indigenous peoples, some in partnership with IFAD, I would like to move now to key challenges indigenous peoples face. While indigenous peoples are confronted with climate change they are also facing impunity and criminalization. The democratic spaces for people to resist and protest against initiatives and policies which violate their human rights, are shrinking in ways we never imagined. I have seen a very bad trend of indigenous peoples being criminalized by the State and private actors. Prior to the presentation of criminal charges, defamation and smear campaigns are often directed through social media against indigenous peoples, their leaders and communities, accusing them of being anti-development and acting against the national interest. Hate speech based on racism and discrimination fuels such discourse. In the worst cases, social media portray indigenous peoples as members of criminal gangs, guerrillas, terrorists and threats to national security. Anti-terrorism laws are used against them. Trumped up charges are filed against leaders of indigenous movements and they are brought to jail or even worse subject to extrajudicial killings.

The Global Witness reports in 2016 and 2017 show the disproportionate representation of indigenous peoples amongst those who were killed because they were defending their lands and protecting the environment. In 2017, 207 human rights defenders were killed and majority of these are in Latin America. While the percentage of indigenous peoples fell to 25% of the total number from 40% in 2016, they are still disproportionately represented because they compose only 5% of the total world population. About 80 per cent of the killings took place in just four countries: Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and the Philippines. The Frontline Defense Global Analysis of 2018 shows that in 2018 there were 321 defenders in 27 countries who were killed and more than 77% of the total were activists defending land, environmental and indigenous peoples' rights. Most of them were fighting against extractive industries and State-sponsored mega-projects. Joan Carling and myself, have been victims of criminalization as well. Our names were included in a list of alleged terrorists made by the Government last year in March. We feared for our own lives but we launched a strong campaign to fight against this. Because of the widespread condemnation from all parts of the world against this, the government finally removed this list from their petition to declare the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New Peoples' Army as terrorist organizations.

Some of my recommendations include a zero-tolerance approach to the killing of and violence against indigenous human rights defenders must be adopted at the highest level of Government. All public officials must refrain from stigmatizing indigenous communities affected by large-scale development projects and those defending their rights, and recognize that their concerns are legitimate components in a process aimed at securing sustainable development. I also called on the need to address the root causes of attacks and criminalization, collective land rights of

indigenous peoples need to be recognized. This requires, inter alia, accessible, prompt and effective procedures to adjudicate land titles; the review of laws on expropriation; adequate mechanisms to resolve land disputes; effective protection from encroachment, including through early warning systems and on-site monitoring systems; and the prohibition of forced evictions .

I will now end on a bright note. As I mentioned earlier, one of my reports last year was on Indigenous Governance. I will make a fuller report on this for 2019 and this will be presented to the General Assembly in October. This is where I see some hope, as in many countries which I visited I have seen that indigenous peoples generally live better if they have autonomous governance arrangements. In Mexico, Ecuador, Peru and Colombia, I talked with indigenous peoples who live in autonomous municipalities, which are recognized by governments or are self-declared. They are able to protect their territories from the incursions of unwanted third parties, whether these are mining or logging companies or drug syndicates. They are able to pursue their traditional livelihoods and run their schools and health care systems in culturally appropriate ways.

They also have set up community guards who are the ones ensuring the peace and security of the people in the autonomous unit. Several of them reported that they are able to keep away drug cartels from entering their territories and recruiting their young children to become drug mules. Conflict resolution are usually dealt with more effectively. In terms of using their traditional knowledge and doing natural resource management, there are data which show that their ways conserving and sustainably using their biodiversity are much better regulated and controlled. Even their capacities to adapt and mitigate climate change are higher when they are self-governing. Of course, they need government support to do all these and the inadequacy of financial and technical support are the biggest stumbling blocks. I would like to stress that support be provided to indigenous women and youth because the women are the main holders and transmitters of indigenous knowledge and the youth are the future holders and practitioners of this knowledge.

I linked Indigenous Governance with the SDGs. I stressed that the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of indigenous peoples will stand a greater chance of being achieved if real decision-making is carried out by them and through their own governance systems, which promote their own cultural values and norms. Goal 16 aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Targets 16.6, on developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions, and 16.7, on ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making, at all levels, are relevant to indigenous peoples' right to self-governance and participation.

Indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge and practices relating to land and resource management, as well as their customary laws on land and resource use, access, control and ownership, have a direct link to Goal 15, on life on land, including with regard to the protection and restoration of terrestrial ecosystems and the promotion of their sustainable use, sustainably managing forests, combating desertification and reversing land degradation and biodiversity loss. As I mentioned earlier there is an overlap between the territories and areas of indigenous peoples and high levels of biodiversity and healthy forests. While indigenous peoples occupy 22 per cent

of the world's landmass, 80 per cent of the world's biodiversity is found in their lands and territories. A key factor explaining this overlap is in indigenous peoples' governance systems and customary laws, which define their relationships to their lands, territories and resources. Maintaining collective ownership and management of their lands and resources is one element of those customary laws.

Goal 12, on ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns, is also linked to indigenous governance. A cursory analysis of indigenous cultural norms and values reveals the centrality of the values of reciprocity and solidarity to those cultures, especially with regard to the relationship between indigenous peoples and nature or Mother Earth and with the rest of humanity. Those values are reflected in customary laws, which determine the rules for accessing non-timber products from forests (Brazil nuts, rattan, mushrooms, etc.), as well as the methods, other than cash crops and animal husbandry, used in the production of food brought to the market. In some indigenous communities, the use of genetically modified organisms, toxic pesticides and agrochemicals has been regulated by traditional authorities, and campaigns have been launched on the adverse environmental and social impacts of these technologies. Indigenous livelihoods such as reindeer herding, pastoralism, fishing and shifting cultivation, among others, are discussed by the indigenous decision-making bodies, which establish rules to avoid overfishing and for the management of grazing lands. Food security remains a key issue tackled by many indigenous governance systems because of the impacts of climate change, especially floods, droughts, hurricanes and desertification

I have read some of the reports of IFAD and I have found some which are on indigenous governance. I think that it will be worthwhile for IFAD and other institutions to support indigenous peoples efforts to self-govern. The decentralization of IFAD in which you brought your people nearer to the ground might provide more possibilities for you to support indigenous governance. In my conversations with some government officials, they do admit that indicators of well-being and peace and security are better in indigenous governed territories. More reports need to be generated to show these. Indigenous peoples who are self-governing can do the monitoring and reporting of the changes which have occurred. I found the stories of indigenous peoples who are self-governing highly inspiring. Maybe our next Indigenous Forum can have this as its theme.

Thank you again for giving me this chance and I wish you all the best.

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