High Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development 2019

Statement of the Indigenous Peoples Major Group

Session on Least Developing Countries

The Indigenous Peoples Major Group expressed its concern on the increasing authoritarian states and domination of elite political power in least developing countries across Asia, Latin America and Africa. This is setting limitations to the meaningful participation of civil society including indigenous peoples in the SDG implementation. In their pursuit to achieve economic growth, large infrastructure projects are implemented in indigenous territories without meaningful consultations and consent of indigenous peoples. Further, it is resulting to the massive violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms, including access to information, freedom of expression and assembly and lack of access to Justice. The Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights indicated that at least 20 indigenous leaders had been murdered in Guatemala in 2018, largely activists defending their lands, territories and other rights. In Cambodia in 2018 alone, 34 indigenous Human Rights Defenders including 12 women had been jailed with cases of incitement against the government, destruction of private property, theft/robbery and other criminal charges as a response to the legitimate actions of indigenous communities in defending their lands against economic land concessions. In Kenya, in December 2018, 35 human rights defenders challenging the implementation of mega-infrastructure projects were subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention, physical violence and threats by the Kenyan police and military personnel.[[1]](#footnote-1)

These cases represent the worsening political environment that is not aligned to principles of inclusive and sustainable development and contrary to the pledge of leaving no one behind in the implementation of the SDGs. Further, indigenous peoples are contributing to sustainable development with their low carbon lifestyles, and sustainable management of resources, but are treated as anti-development and persecuted when they defend their lands and resources against destructive projects being imposed on them in the name of sustainable development.

It is thereby imperative that democratic participation based on the respect for human rights, including the collective rights of indigenous peoples should be guaranteed in order to address the gaps and achieve progress in the implementation of the SDGs. Development actors including investors and businesses should also respect human rights in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Violations of human rights including the collective rights of indigenous peoples rights cannot be an excuse to reach economic growth targets to achieve sustainable development in least developing countries, and state’s accountability to its citizens, particularly to those left behind needs to be strengthened.

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)