

High Level Political Forum- 2020

Statement of the Indigenous Peoples Major Group - IPMG

Transformative pathways to realize the 2030 Agenda: a whole of society approach taking into account the impact of COVID19 (Stakeholders Perspectives)

The ongoing COVID 19 pandemic is affecting disproportionately the indigenous peoples across the globe. They comprise 6.2% of the global population who are not just left behind but pushed behind further in the implementation of the SDGs. The historical condition of indigenous peoples as impoverished which is 15% of the global extremely poor population makes them highly vulnerable to contract the virus and have the least access to proper medical treatment. The disproportionate number of infection and death of indigenous peoples in the U.S. and Brazil due to the pandemic clearly demonstrate the continuing discrimination of indigenous peoples such as the lack of equal access to health services, water and sanitation facilities, basic infrastructures such as energy and communication facilities, education and other basic social services. Further, indigenous peoples are also discriminated in the support and assistance provided by States such as in the distribution of protective equipment, relief packages, income and livelihood assistance.

The lockdowns and other restrictive measures imposed by States to control the spread of the virus are also resulting to more hardships and difficulties for the impoverished majority of indigenous peoples living in both urban and rural areas. These restrictions are causing loss of income and livelihoods, more hunger and thereby less resistance to diseases, undermining mental health, and increasing vulnerabilities to violence and abuse of indigenous women and girls among others. Moreover, land grabbing including deforestation persist in several countries where indigenous peoples are in self-isolation to prevent the virus. The criminalization of indigenous peoples when they defend their lands, resources and livelihoods is also worsening in many developed and developing countries. The land and resource grab and criminalization of indigenous peoples is expected to worsen when States implement their economic growth targets for recovery from the impacts of the pandemic based on resource extraction and profit generation. If the COVID 19 recovery plans remain under business as usual approach, this will certainly push indigenous peoples further behind, and will worsen inequality and environmental destruction. For many indigenous peoples, this is tantamount to their existential crisis with a grim future for the coming generations.

While indigenous peoples bear the brunt of the pandemic, the continuing lack of data disaggregation by ethnicity is keeping indigenous peoples invisible in data related to the COVID 19 pandemic including on the impacts of state's response measures and also on the progress and gaps in the implementation of the SDGs.

Accelerating Actions and delivery of the 2030 Agenda in the next ten years will require decisive actions at all levels, that should result to long lasting transformation on the ground in ensuring the wellbeing of peoples and protection of the planet. The 2030 Agenda provides key principles, but these are not translated into appropriate and critical actions to address the structural barriers to sustainable development. For example, more and more

States are saying we cannot remain in doing business as usual if we are to advance the SDGs and that “no one should be left behind”. However, the same States are the ones fully supporting the fossil fuel industry, unequal trade relations, unsustainable agribusiness expansion, and allowing the worst forms of corruption, bribery, tax evasion, war and conflicts, violence and oppression of women, massive land and resource grab and human rights violations with impunity. This reality on the ground by indigenous peoples and other marginalized sectors are largely ignored in designing and implementing the SDGs from global to local levels.

Likewise, the Ministerial Declaration of every High-Level Political Forum is simply a reiteration of the elements of the Political Declaration of the 2030 Agenda. It fails to provide the strategic guidance and means needed to address the continuing gaps and challenges to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs. The negotiations on the Ministerial Declaration is illustrating an utter lack of political will and determination by States to go beyond national interest and agenda and agree on key steps to transform the unjust economic and political order to achieve sustainable development for all. After four years of SDG implementation, the UN as the valuable multilateral body to address global issues and strengthen global cooperation and solidarity, needs to invigorate itself and provide the collective leadership and concerted actions to make real changes on the ground in advancing sustainable development for all.

The Indigenous Peoples Major Group puts forward the following transformational actions needed to accelerate the delivery of the 2030 Agenda.

1. Ensure policy coherence guided by a human rights framework and environmental sustainability

While the SDGs calls for the balance implementation of the economic, social and environment dimensions, the main thrust of SDG implementation continues to be economic growth. The social and environmental concerns are not fully addressed and incorporated in terms of policies and measures to be enforced as key elements of SDG implementation. In fact, while the SDG explicitly refers to the realization of human rights (social dimension), key recommendations from human rights bodies are not incorporated in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. In the case of indigenous peoples, majority of the recommendations by human rights bodies and procedures pertain to the continuing violation of the rights of indigenous peoples to their lands, territories, and systemic discrimination resulting to their impoverished condition (Goal 1), lack of education (Goal 4), hunger and food insecurity (Goal 2) loss of livelihood as decent work (Goal 8), violence and abuse of women and girls (Goal 5) loss of forest and biodiversity (Goal 13) and undermining the wellbeing and capacities of indigenous peoples among others, are not addressed thru specific measures and incorporated in the SDG implementation.

Many states still refuse to fully recognize indigenous peoples as a distinct sector with inherent collective rights affirmed by their commitment to international human rights instruments. In particular, the legal recognition of the right of indigenous peoples to their lands, territories and resources is a core element for them not to be pushed behind in the

SDGs. Likewise, while national plans mention the protection of the environment, agribusiness expansion and large infrastructure development with adverse impacts to the environment are not regulated by environment policies. The bigger irony is that while indigenous peoples are the ones managing resources in sustainable ways, they are accused and criminalized as “destroyers of the forest or nature” and or displaced in the name of development. Unless there is policy coherence with a holistic approach and proper implementation anchored on human rights protection, equity and environmental sustainability, the pledge of leaving no one behind remains an empty commitment.

The history of systemic violation of the rights of indigenous peoples including land dispossession was brought about by nation-state building, colonization and subjugation; and the imposition of business interest. This continues to prevail inspite of the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples affirming the right of indigenous peoples to their rights, territories and resources, to self-determination and their cultural heritage as the foundation of their dignity, collective survival and sustainable development as distinct peoples.

2. Strengthen States' Accountability and Ensure Democratic Participation of Citizens

The accountability of States to its citizens is fundamental to achieving a people-centered sustainable development. However, many States refuse to make themselves accountable through specific laws, policies and measures and its proper implementation and enforcement. This relates to transparency in decision-making, public access to information, anti-corruption policies and regulations, upholding public interest at all times by public officials, economic development to serve and benefit the people, respect for the rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens, good governance and access to justice among others. What is worrying is the current trend on the rise of authoritarian States which do not provide for the democratic space and meaningful participation of citizens including indigenous peoples in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. These States are unjustly curtailing fundamental rights and freedoms in the name of national security, anti-terrorism peace and order, and even using the COVID 19 pandemic.

Indigenous peoples who are actively defending their right to the lands, territories and resources, and their right to express their critical views are being criminalized, arbitrarily arrested and detained. The extra judicial killings of indigenous peoples are taking place with impunity in a number of countries. Access to justice by victims of human rights violations is a duty of States which is often denied not only at the local and national level but also at the regional and global level. The UN system needs to take appropriate actions to address the continuing human rights violations of and criminalization of indigenous peoples with impunity; and facilitate access to justice by victims and their families as critical concern in advancing the SDGs (Goal 16). Likewise, unless there is meaningful participation of citizens including indigenous peoples and marginalized groups as rights-holders, the implementation of the SDGs will not be able to capture their priorities, needs and aspirations. The continuing top down approach is driven by vested interest by those power resulting to more inequality, discrimination and maldevelopment.

3. Transform the global economic order to be people-centered with equity and sustainability

The continuing economic dominance of developed countries through unjust trade and capitalist system of nature and human exploitation is fully acknowledged even by States as a main driver of worsening inequality. However, transformational actions through bold measures to end tax evasion, removal of barriers to fair and equitable trade, strong measures to regulate corporations and investors on their unwarranted influence and economic dominance; their compliance to environment protection and respect for human rights; and ensuring the rights and welfare of workers including the protection of women workers from violence and for equal treatment and economic opportunities need to be imbedded in SDG plans and actions at national, regional and global levels. These should also be included in the Public-Private Partnerships as means of implementation of the SDGs.

For indigenous peoples, the requirement for their Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) as integral to the recognition and protection of their rights to their lands, territories and resources and self-determination shall be guaranteed in relation to any business operations affecting them. This should include renewable energy development, agri-business, infrastructures and other development projects. Equitable benefit sharing and protection of human rights provide a good opportunity and momentum to build partnerships with indigenous peoples in advancing sustainable development under the pledge of leaving no one behind.

The transforming the global economic order needs to gear away from greed and unbridled exploitation. It should ensure a holistic approach to the sustainable use, management and conservation of natural resources to meet the needs of the vast majority. At the same time, the sustainability and the protection of the planet for the present and future generations should be ensured. In this context, indigenous peoples' play a critical role and their contributions should be protected and enhanced. Indigenous peoples as rights holders and agents of change will continue to pursue the realization of the rights and broaden its cooperation and solidarity in advancing sustainable development for all.###