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Archbishop Caccia Delivers Statement On The Rights Of Indigenous People

By H. E. Archbishop Gabriele Caccia

Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations

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Mr. Chair,

Today's discussion on the rights of indigenous peoples is an apt opportunity to underscore the need to respect and protect their rights, their cultural heritage, lands, and livelihoods, while promoting sustainable development.

Mr. Chair,

Indigenous peoples face many different challenges. Some communities are at risk from climate change, others in danger of losing their lands, "due to powerful agro-industrial interests or the powerful processes of assimilation and urbanization."^[1] These issues are made worse by unsustainable tourism, which shows little respect for environments that do not belong to them.^[2]

These and numerous other challenges faced by indigenous communities, including food insecurity and the effects of nuclear tests, arise from the a lack of respect. Pope Francis called this a "form of violence,"^[3] and it must be urgently addressed.

The first step is to establish respect, recognizing that indigenous communities enjoy a unique cultural heritage, which they have the right to maintain, control, protect, and develop. The international community should acknowledge this cultural heritage and help it to flourish.

The protection of indigenous traditional knowledge must remain a priority. Indigenous peoples possess a wealth of experience in a multitude of fields, including the safeguarding of forest environment and biodiversity, through the optimization of agricultural yields in extreme mountain regions, and the transmission of traditional languages. Indeed, over 4,000 of the world's 7,000 languages are spoken by indigenous communities. It is important to safeguard and promote this traditional knowledge.

Furthermore, the environmental stewardship practices of indigenous peoples, rooted in centuries of tradition and respect for nature, must be duly recognized and integrated into global climate and biodiversity strategies.

Indigenous young people, as outlined by the priority theme of the 2024 session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, are vital custodians of their cultural heritage, overarching bridges between generations, and leading advocates for the protection of natural resources and ecosystems. Their commitment to preserving their roots and their environment deserves the full and continued support of States and the international community.

Mr. Chair,

In conclusion, “it is essential,” in the words of Pope Francis, “to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. [...] For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God [...] a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values.”^[4]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[1] Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 471.

[2] Cfr. Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Message for World Tourism Day 2022, 27 September 2022.

[3] Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 220.

[4] Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*, 146.





Permanent
Observer Mission
of the Holy See to
the United Nations
25 East 39th Street
New York NY
10016-0903



Phone: (212) 370-
7885

Fax: (212) 370-
9622

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