

Rights of indigenous peoples 'not in a very good state,' UN expert says

1 May 2017 – The rights of indigenous peoples are being abused by authorities and corporations that want access to their land and the resources – such as petrol – that lie beneath it, the United Nations expert on the issue today said on the sidelines of the 2017 session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, currently under way in New York.

“The situation of indigenous peoples’ rights is really not in a very good state these days because there are policies and laws used to criminalize them,” Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, said in a press briefing alongside three other indigenous leaders.

She noted the use of harassment, torture and arrests against indigenous peoples peacefully protecting their property. This is out of line with the <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html> UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the General Assembly in September 2007, which established a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity, well-being and rights of the world’s indigenous peoples.

“The main preoccupation of indigenous peoples is really to work on the defence of their land and resources, and protection of the right of self-determination. In their assertion of this right, they are accused of being a terrorist or arrested,” Ms. Tauli-Corpuz.

The independent UN expert just returned from Honduras, where she met with the family of an indigenous right defender killed last year. She noted the hearings in the case are being delayed and said that there was a “lack of determination from the side of prosecutors to pursue” a case.

Ms. Tauli-Corpuz had also recently been in the United States, where members of the Standing Rock reservation are protesting the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. There, she saw indigenous peoples arrested and pounced on by police dogs.

These “gatherings are not violent and should not be subjected to this type of force,” said Ms. Tauli-Corpuz.

Indigenous peoples represent five per cent of the world’s population, but their lands hold about 80 per cent of the world’s biodiversity, according to UN-cited figures.

“Petrol, minerals, it’s all beneath the earth, which leads to a tremendous problem,” said Lourdes Tibán Guala, a Member of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues from Ecuador.

Speaking alongside Ms. Tauli-Corpuz, she described the importance of land to indigenous peoples: “The land passes everything, health, education,

agriculture. But whenever there are discussions about the economy of a country, indigenous people's lands are the first to be used."

This is done without discussions with the indigenous peoples, but with the belief that the nations will trade for "some chickens, some cows."

"But indigenous peoples do not want machinery on their territory without prior consultation," the Ecuadorian advocate stressed.

Among other issues raised in today's briefing was the idea of having an Ambassador for the indigenous peoples joining Ambassadors from the 193 UN Member States on the General Assembly floor.

The [sixteenth session](#), of the [Permanent Forum](#), which opened last Monday, runs at UN Headquarters through Friday, 5 May.