



INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

Statement by the International Labour Organization to the 17th session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Item 4: Implementation of the six mandated areas of the Permanent Forum with reference to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

United Nations Headquarters, New York

Mr. Martin Oelz, ILO

Chair, members of the Forum and distinguished delegates,

The International Labour Organization is pleased to engage in the critical discussions underway in the 17th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

As you are aware, the ILO is working towards furthering indigenous and tribal peoples' well-being and rights under the umbrella of Convention No. 169 and other ILO standards, as well as the ILO's 2015 strategy for action regarding indigenous and tribal peoples.

As the international community moves towards realizing the Sustainable Development Goals, and ensuring that no one is left behind, the ILO would like to stress on the importance of addressing social and economic challenges faced by indigenous women and men in the world of work.

The economic activities of indigenous women and men have been transforming, and with it, their places of work. Many are struggling to generate adequate incomes from traditional activities to meet their everyday needs due to factors ranging from low skills and lack of lands rights to poor market access and impacts of climate change. In the process, more and more indigenous women and men have been migrating away from their traditional areas, in search of economic opportunities, to both rural and urban areas.

Indigenous women and men work in a wide range of sectors, as construction workers, street vendors, on plantations, in natural reserves, the tourism industry, in the services sectors or as domestic workers. Often however, opportunities for indigenous women and men are limited to the informal economy, where working conditions are poor and violations of fundamental rights at work are more likely to occur. In this context, indigenous women in particular are vulnerable to exploitation, and face rampant discrimination because they are women and because they are indigenous.

Excellences,

Ladies and gentlemen,

With limited awareness about their rights at work, and numerous barriers to access the formal economy, indigenous peoples are being trapped within new cycles of marginalization. This cycle, however, can and must be broken.

On the one hand, securing collective rights to lands and natural resources, and ensuring income generating and decent work opportunities in traditional areas is critical. On the other hand, understanding the transformations of indigenous peoples' economic activities and addressing the challenges associated with working conditions is equally important.

The ILO has, therefore, been increasing the knowledge base on the situation of indigenous peoples involved in diverse economic activities, for example in tea plantations, beauty parlours and the garments sector. At the same time, the ILO has been promoting fundamental rights at work by raising awareness, capacity building and facilitating dialogue among governments, trade unions, employers and indigenous peoples.

In Bolivia, for example, the ILO has been working with indigenous women construction workers, local governments, and employers to support trainings on occupational safety and health on construction sites and to enhance access to job opportunities.

In Bangladesh, ILO interventions supported the creation of a network of indigenous workers engaged in diverse sectors to better voice their concerns and seek out improvements in their working conditions, including through alliances with the trade unions movement.

In Guatemala, the ILO is supporting efforts of unions and other local stakeholders to empower indigenous women domestic worker and protect their rights.

Such interventions have been able to provide a glimpse into the potential ways forward in addressing the challenges that indigenous women and men face in the changing world of work, and ensuring that their social, cultural and economic aspirations take centre stage.

We all must do our best to accelerate action towards decent work for indigenous women and men! And consultation and participation of indigenous peoples is essential in this regard, so that they have a voice in shaping policies that affect them.

The ILO will continue tackling the challenges of the transformations in the world of work for indigenous peoples, standing ready as a partner to ensure indigenous women and men have access to decent work opportunities and social protection.