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## **Indigenous peoples suffer abuses in race for natural resources – UN rights expert**



Special Rapporteur James Anaya

20 September 2011 –

Extraction of natural resources and other major development projects in or near the territories of indigenous peoples is one of the most significant sources of abuse of their human rights worldwide, an independent United Nations expert warned today.

“In its prevailing form, the model for advancing with natural resource extraction within the territories of indigenous peoples appears to run counter to the self-determination of indigenous peoples in the political, social and economic spheres,” the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples James Anaya [told](#) the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

In a [report](#) based on answers to a questionnaire he distributed to governments, indigenous peoples and organizations, business corporations and other actors, he cited conflicting viewpoints on the potential adverse impact and benefits of such activities as mining, forestry, oil and natural gas extraction and hydroelectric projects in indigenous territories.

He said he had made it a priority to reconcile the differing views and courses of action to ensure the full protection of indigenous rights and promote best practices through a broad dialogue with governments, indigenous peoples' organizations, corporate actors and international institutions, in which consensus-building would be a key element.

“The lack of a minimum common ground for understanding the key issues by all actors concerned entails a major barrier for the effective protection and realization of indigenous peoples' rights,” he added, praising a new Peruvian law compelling private companies to consult indigenous communities before going ahead with major projects such as mining.

Among key concerns, Mr. Anaya included the gradual loss of control by indigenous peoples over lands, territories and natural resources; water source depletion and contamination for drinking, farming and grazing; the adverse effects of water and airborne pollution on overall community health; and an increase in infectious diseases spread by interaction with workers or settlers.

Another concern was the adverse impact on indigenous social structures and cultures, including alarming rates of alcoholism and prostitution previously unheard of among such peoples, imported by illegal loggers or miners, non-indigenous workers and industry personnel in specific projects, and increased traffic due to the construction of roads and other infrastructure.

“Submissions by indigenous peoples and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also reported an escalation of violence by government and private security forces as a consequence of extractive operations in indigenous territories, especially against indigenous leaders,” Mr. Anaya noted. “A general repression of human rights was reported in situations where entire communities had voiced their opposition to extractive operations.”

Several governments highlighted the key importance of natural resource extraction projects for their domestic economies that, reportedly accounting for up to 60 to 70 per cent of the gross national product (GNP) in some countries, with positive benefits for indigenous peoples.

Mining companies noted that indigenous peoples have been direct beneficiaries of basic infrastructure construction such as roads, communications, electricity and water services, as well as health and educational opportunities.

But most indigenous peoples underscored the adverse effects on their environment, culture and societies, which they said outweighed the minimal or short-term benefits arising out of extractive operations.

For example, a member of the Pemon people of Venezuela reported that benefits from extractive industries were not a top priority within the community, which sought “healthy communities, with no infections, in a pollution-free environment,” Mr. Anaya said.

Similarly, an organization representing the traditional authorities of the Cofan people of Colombia concluded that “indigenous peoples are left with no option other than to try to find something positive for their communities out of the disaster left behind by the extraction of oil, mineral, and other resources” in their lands.

“The vast majority of indigenous peoples’ responses, many of which stemmed from the direct experience of specific projects affecting their territories and communities, rather emphasized a common perception of disenfranchisement, ignorance of their rights and concerns on the part of States and businesses enterprises, and constant life insecurity in the face of encroaching extractive activities,” Mr. Anaya said.

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