

Joint Submission by **United Confederation of Taino People (UCTP)** and the **Caribbean Amerindian Development Organization (CADO)**.

## Call for Inputs

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to the General Assembly

Impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples

Deadline: 19 June 2020

### **Questionnaire for responses by States, indigenous peoples and other actors:**

- 1. How does the State collect and analyse information on the impact of COVID-19 on indigenous peoples and individuals? Is disaggregated data on indigenous peoples, including health impacts, available?**

In the insular Caribbean region, including States and territorial possessions, disaggregated data on Indigenous Peoples is not readily available and practically non-existent. In most insular Caribbean States, disaggregated data on Indigenous Peoples is not separated from civil society. Where the opportunities do not exist, the governments of Caribbean Insular States and territorial possessions should provide the ability for Indigenous Peoples to self-identify in data collection.

- 2. Please provide information and specific examples showing the increased risks and/or disproportionate health impact of the pandemic on indigenous peoples. What measures have been taken to provide health care and other forms or urgent assistance for remote communities?**

Pre-existing health conditions, lack of medical insurance, and poverty increase the risks and disproportionate health impacts of Indigenous Peoples in the Caribbean insular region. On islands such as the archipelago of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, slow or inadequate recovery (economic, social, and developmental) from natural disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes exacerbate inequalities. For example, the hospital in the island municipality of Bieke (Vieques) was destroyed by Hurricane María in Sept. 2017. Transportation to and from the big island has been erratic and unstable. Yet, the government has allowed tourists to begin visiting the island, placing the Indigenous Peoples and local communities at greatest risk of getting the COVID19 and not having an immediate way to get medical assistance.

- 3. How are indigenous peoples supported in their own initiatives to fight the pandemic, protect health and provide assistance in their own communities? What lessons can be learnt from indigenous traditional practices and community-based programs in lock down and emergency?**

While seeking assistance from States, Indigenous Peoples have looked toward own initiatives such as community awareness and relief efforts engaging local and outside financial assistance (grants, crowd sourcing, in-kind contributions, etc.), as well as increased self-isolation, accessing traditional or alternative medicines and promoting food sovereignty and traditional agricultural practices.

- 4. How are indigenous peoples given the possibility to shape the national COVID-19 response to ensure it does not have discriminatory effect on their communities? Is their input sought and respected in the programs that could affect them?**

In the insular Caribbean (States and territorial possessions), the input of Indigenous Peoples is not sought or generally respected in the development of programs that could affect them. Lack of visibility and recognition increases the challenges for insular Caribbean Indigenous Peoples to deal with the pandemic more effectively.

- 5. How is information about COVID-19 and prevention measures disseminated in indigenous communities? Is such information available in indigenous languages?**

No, this is not a practice in the insular Caribbean. There is no State support for Indigenous languages in the region.

- 6. Please provide examples of good practices and targeted measures to redress the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on indigenous peoples' health. If these are being carried out by State, provincial and local governments, please explain how these measures were designed in consultation and implementing free prior and informed consent with the indigenous peoples concerned in order to ensure that such measures are adapted to the cultural and other specific needs of these indigenous communities.**

There are no examples of State-initiative in the good practices and targeted measures to redress the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on indigenous peoples' health in the insular Caribbean. Indigenous Peoples Organizations have undertaken limited campaigns to address the issues, but lack funding beyond small grants or crowd sourcing to be more effective. In the archipelago of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, for instance, the exercise and/or practice of Free Prior and Informed Consent has been non-existent. Indigenous Peoples Organizations did not receive any COVID19 assistance from the U.S. government to shape national or community strategies to deal with COVID19, which is in contrast to assistance provided to U.S. Federally Recognized Tribes.

- 7. Please provide information on the economic, social and cultural impact of lockdowns, quarantines, travel and other restriction of freedom of movement on indigenous communities. Please provide information on measures taken to ensure indigenous communities do not experience discriminatory impacts on their access to livelihoods, food and education. How are indigenous peoples taken into account in the development of assistance and relief programmes? Where are the gaps if any?**

Curfews, lock-downs, shutting down of public transportation, rising unemployment all impact insular Caribbean Peoples as these situations exacerbate impoverished and inequalities conditions. Lack of or extremely limited testing opportunities makes analysis on Indigenous Peoples more challenging in the region.

- 8. Please provide information on how indigenous women, older persons, children, persons with disabilities and LGBTI persons are or may be facing additional human rights challenges during the pandemic. Please provide information on targeted measures taken to prevent intersecting forms of discrimination, and ensure indigenous women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities and LGBTI persons' access, protection and services with due regards to their specific needs within indigenous communities.**

There is currently no data on these specific issues in the insular Caribbean region. It is important we share an example of impact on women and children with regards to the exercise of our rights. When the insular government in Puerto Rico allowed religious institutions to congregate, certain Parks, including our Indigenous Ceremonial Parks and Plazas (Bateyes) in the big island were still closed. Just about a week ago, three Taíno Mothers went to one of our bateyes for ceremony and to educate their children ages 1-7, on our spirituality, as well as to teach about important dates we celebrate during the month of June. The Park's official gates were closed. The Police was called by someone unknown and they came to remove those mothers and their children from our Ceremonial Park. These are violations to articles 12, 11 and 13 of the UNDRIP.

9. **Please provide information on how States of emergency may contribute to threats or aggravate ongoing human rights violations against indigenous peoples, including with regards to the freedom of assembly and the protection of their traditional lands and resources. What measures have been taken to protect the lands, territories and resources of indigenous peoples against invasions and land-grabbing by external actors during the pandemic?**

Indigenous Peoples are largely invisible in the insular Caribbean and there are no measures that have been taken to protect the lands, territories and resources of indigenous peoples against invasions and land-grabbing by external actors during the pandemic. As a matter of fact, it is the view of the United Confederation of Taíno People (UCTP) and the Caribbean Amerindian Development Organization (CADO) that during this quarantine period certain governments have used the pandemic as cover to take advantage and move forward a multitude of projects that directly impact sacred and archaeological sites. One such case impacting a sacred site is taking place in the U.S. Caribbean territory of Puerto Rico and involves the expansion of the Dorado 18 project by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers and the Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office (PRSHPO).

\*\*\*

The responses to the above questionnaire can be submitted in English, French or Spanish. Please send your inputs by email to [indigenous@ohchr.org](mailto:indigenous@ohchr.org) by **19 June 2020**. Please limit your responses to a **maximum of 3,000 words**. Reports, academic studies and other types of background materials can be attached as **annexes** to the submission. Please submit your responses in an accessible format, such as MS Word or PDF accessible.

Unless requested otherwise, the submissions may be referenced in the report and briefings of the Special Rapporteur and related information products.

LINK:

[https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/SRIndigenousPeoples/Pages/Callforinput\\_COVID19.aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/SRIndigenousPeoples/Pages/Callforinput_COVID19.aspx)