

21<sup>st</sup> Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 4/25 – 5/6, 2022

Item 5(d) Human rights dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Presented by: Tai Pellicier – United Confederation of Taíno People, Wednesday, April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Hahom (Thank you), Mr. Chair, and congratulations on your distinguished appointment. Taigüei d'aniki guaitiao (Greetings my dear relatives), Special Rapporteur and Experts. Good Day, dear relatives, Special Rapporteur and Experts.

For years, the United Confederation of Taíno People has attended this forum, addressing the lack of implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, particularly in the archipelago of Borikén, known to many as Puerto Rico, a colony of the United States.

The wrath of greed and uncontrolled development are beginning to seem as dangerous as the Hurricanes, earthquakes and pandemic that we are still trying to survive.

The total disregard for our archaeological sites such as the Kaguana Ceremonial Center and other sacred spaces, as well as the lack of access to these seem to be the “soup of the day.” Environmental Violence such as illegally deposited toxic coal ashes and military waste contamination in the municipalities of Vieques and Culebra continue to be a problem. Increasing cancer rates and other non-contagious diseases are a direct result of the environmental injustices our people confront every day.

While the impacts of Climate Change are clear and devastating, permits continue to be issued for luxury constructions in our already vulnerable environments, including in so-called protected areas, and areas categorized by UNESCO as Biosphere Reserves, such as the Dry Forest in the main Island of Borikén. This is a violation of our right to a healthy environment.

Distinguished brothers and sisters, for as long as there is no tangible, official report on how States have respected, implemented, and or are upholding our rights, especially our right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent and our Right to self-determination, we will continue coming here year after year presenting the same issues to no avail. We know some states are still trying to qualify the Declaration, even though their commitment in its adoption was to uphold and implement it.

The United Confederation of Taíno People is therefore calling on the Special Rapporteur and the EMRIP to assist us in presenting these protected area issues to UNESCO. In addition, UNESCO's mandate on protected areas needs to be reviewed and there needs to be transparency on how sites, especially ones that are linked to Indigenous cultural heritage, are being managed.

Hahom.