

Indigenous represent 5% of world's population and 15% of poor



United Nations, August 13 (RHC)-- Indigenous people represent only five percent of the world's population, yet these communities struggle with 15 percent of the global poverty, say human rights groups on the eve of World Indigenous People's Day.

There are some 5,000 Indigenous groups living in 70 countries, United Nations reports. These communities contribute to the global environment and conserve nearly 80 percent of the world's biodiversity. However, they only own 11 percent of these territories and are constantly called to defend these lands against corporations and neoliberal policies desperate to meet the needs of foreign manufacturers. They are also some of the most targeted by killers who want the land.

"Being Indigenous is often synonymous with exploitation, discrimination, poverty and violence. This is because the majority of the Indigenous people were once colonized, which frequently led to some kind of slavery," said Waldo Fernandez of Manos Unidas, a Peruvian nonprofit that works for Indigenous equality.

"The Indigenous people continue to suffer a strong discrimination that implies great social, labor, economic and political repercussions in their day to day. In addition, they are usually excluded from

decision making and political instances; they have limited access to justice and their rights are violated with impunity,” he added.

With the majority of a community’s traditions passing through the hands of its female members, when resources become scarce, women are expected to brave the dangerous terrain, rife with conflict and violent paramilitaries, Fernandez said. They are the most at risk during these turbulent times.

People must “turn (their) eyes to these peoples, at a time when the world is deteriorating by leaps and bounds and seems to have awakened ecological awareness and the need for the care of the planet,” he said.

For them, "the earth is not only an economic good, but it constitutes the physical and psychosocial space where their ancestors lived, where their relationships and their social organization are established and where they interact to sustain their identity and their values.

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