

Press Release

Better protection for Indigenous peoples

ILO Convention 169 on the Protection of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples enters into force for Germany. Alliance calls for concrete measures

Berlin, June 21, 2022. Around 6,000 indigenous peoples exist worldwide and their rights are violated in many places. To protect the rights of indigenous peoples, there is only one legally-binding agreement under international law, the ILO Convention 169. In Brazil, far-right President Jair Bolsonaro is threatening to withdraw his country from ILO Convention 169, thus weakening the instrument's relevance. In Germany, on the other hand, the ratification will come into force on June 23, 2022, one year after the deposit of the ratification document with the ILO. By joining, Germany is sending an important signal. But symbolic accession must now be followed by concrete action.

The ILO169 Coordination Circle appeals to the German government to develop and consistently implement an interministerial strategy for the protection of the rights of Indigenous peoples before the end of this legislative period. Such a strategy must involve all ministries concerned. "All German projects and investments must fundamentally guarantee the protection of biodiversity and the rights of Indigenous peoples. We are rights holders, not objects of political narratives," says Harol Rincón Ipuchima of the Umbrella Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Amazonia.

Globally, we are experiencing an unprecedented escalation of geopolitical, human rights, environmental and climate-related conflicts and crises. It is becoming openly apparent that peaceful coexistence is directly linked to our use of natural resources. "Against this backdrop, the territories of Indigenous Peoples and their traditional knowledge are more than ever of paramount importance for the preservation of biological and cultural diversity and for the future life of humanity worldwide," says Vicky Tauli-Corpuz of Tebtebba (Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education, Philippines).

Indigenous human rights and environmental defenders are at the center of increasing conflicts over the global exploitation of natural resources. Although indigenous communities make up only 5% of the world's population, more than one-third of all fatal attacks on environmental and human rights defenders between 2015 and 2019 affected members of Indigenous peoples, according to the NGO Global Witness. The entry into force of ILO Convention 169 comes at a time when the German and Colombian governments are negotiating an increase in Colombian coal imports to Germany. Increased coal mining poses a major threat to the Wayuú indigenous communities, whose human rights have been violated for decades by the El Cerrejón mine.

Now that it has acceded to ILO Convention 169, the German government must assume its responsibility and pay close attention to the conditions under which imported raw materials are mined and advocate the consistent application of the ILO Convention 169 to protect the contractually guaranteed rights of Indigenous peoples. These include, for example, the right to preserve cultural identity, the right to participate in government decision-making, and the right to land and resources. "It takes more than international solidarity to support Indigenous peoples and their communities worldwide. We expect Germany to fully respect the rights of Indigenous peoples and fulfill its responsibilities after ratifying ILO Convention 169," says Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim of the Association of Indigenous Women and Peoples in Chad (AFPAT).

Background

The Coordination Circle ILO 169 in Germany is a coalition of German civil society organizations, networks and experts working to strengthen the rights of Indigenous peoples, human rights, climate protection as well as the protection of rainforests. In 2019, 476 million Indigenous people worldwide belonged to a total of 6,000 peoples. They conserve 80% of global biodiversity. 5% of the world's people are indigenous. At the same time, they make up 15% of the poverty-stricken population and are disproportionately vulnerable to extractivist activities by international corporations. Their living environments are being destroyed by unsustainable development policies. Their diverse cosmovisions and their knowledge are part of the world's intangible cultural heritage.