IPMG OECPR Opening Plenary Intervention 12-1-2025

Thank you Chair, relatives, and colleagues,

My name is Richard Singh Tharu, speaking on behalf of the Indigenous Peoples Major Group to UNEP.

Indigenous People are distinct rights holders under international law. The IPMG is here to ensure that Member States recognise and uphold these obligations in all decision-making processes.

Over the past months, Indigenous Peoples have engaged consistently and in good faith across all CPR Subcommittee meetings, providing technical inputs on each proposed resolution with the aim of strengthening environmental governance, advancing human rights, and ensuring scientific integrity within UNEP's work. We thank Member States and the Secretariat who upheld meaningful participation, and we underscore that this engagement is not symbolic; it is a direct exercise of our right to participation in decision-making as affirmed in United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Articles 18, 19, and 41 including the meaningful participation of children and youth, women, farmers, and persons with disability.

Across all resolutions, whether chemicals and waste, climate and biodiversity linkages, oceans, mining, drought, environmental monitoring, or environmental defenders, **a common thread has emerged**: environmental crises are inseparable from the violation of Indigenous Peoples rights. **Our** lands, territories, waters, and knowledge systems continue to be disproportionately impacted by colonial extractive systems that cause the triple planetary crisis of pollution, biodiversity loss and the climate emergency to which Indigenous Peoples are on the frontline.

We reiterate that the effective implementation of UNEP's mandate requires the explicit recognition of Indigenous Peoples as distinct rights-holders, not stakeholders, nor as part of undefined categories. Our collective rights to self-determination, FPIC, and lands, territories, and resources are not aspirational, **they are** binding standards grounded in UNDRIP, ILO 169, ICESCR, ICCPR, and supported across the entire UN system.

As we move toward UNEA-7, we call on Member States to ensure that all resolutions:

- **Include explicit and consistent references to Indigenous Peoples**, aligned with agreed UN language.

- **Embed FPIC as a safeguard**, not a procedural formality, in all decisions related to minerals, energy systems, chemicals, and emerging technologies.

- **Acknowledge Indigenous Knowledge Systems as equal and complementary to Western science**, consistent with the IPBES and IPCC frameworks.

- **Protect Indigenous environmental human rights defenders**, who face increasing threats for defending their territories at the frontlines of the triple planetary crisis.

- **Reject false solutions** that perpetuate pollution and extraction, **such as:** carbon capture, chemical recycling, deep-sea mining, and harmful desalination projects, and instead elevate community driven, rights based approaches grounded in the leadership of Indigenous Peoples.

Environmental governance cannot succeed without addressing the structural inequities that have allowed environmental harm, resource exploitation, and the displacement of Indigenous Peoples to continue for generations. A healthy Planet depends on safeguarding the Peoples who protect 80 percent of the world's remaining biodiversity.

In closing, we remind Member States that upholding the distinct status of Indigenous Peoples, and avoiding any conflation with other groups, **is fully** consistent with the mandates of all UN mechanisms explicitly dedicated to Indigenous Peoples, including the UNPFII, EMRIP, and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. These bodies affirm that Indigenous Peoples are distinct rights holders under international law, with collective rights to self-determination, lands, territories, and resources. Maintaining this distinction upholds UNDRIP, strengthens accountability, and ensures coherence across the UN system.

Thank you, Chair.