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Statement by FWCC (Quakers) to Independent Expert on the Environment Human Rights Council 6 March 2013

Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers) welcomes the report of the Independent Expert on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, in particular the attention given to procedural rights. We agree that effective public and community participation in decision-making can contribute towards achieving substantive rights and ‘more transparent, better informed and more responsive’ environmental policy.

We are pleased that the specific situation of Indigenous peoples is noted when discussing participatory rights and approaches; it is important that their right to free, prior and informed consent is upheld. We hope that good practice from the process of consulting and cooperating with indigenous peoples can inform consultation and cooperation with other groups that depend on their environment for their lives and livelihoods. These include fishing communities and small farmers, who feed the majority of the world’s population and are therefore critical for world food security. Furthermore, we encourage the Independent Expert to consider ways of effectively consulting with marginalised or vulnerable groups within communities, such as women, the poorest and those facing stigma or oppression. These groups are likely to be excluded from decision-making processes even when the public is able to input into environmental policy, often meaning that their rights, needs and vulnerabilities are not recognised.

We would also like to draw your attention to the role that peacebuilding approaches, which are relevant not only to post-conflict settings, can play in fulfilling procedural rights, as they seek to facilitating effective, legitimate and non-violent social change. Peacebuilding approaches can be used to:

- Build stakeholder capacity: Build the capacity of affected and vulnerable groups and communities and support their effective participation;
- Facilitate dialogue: Improve public participation by bringing together different social groups and stakeholders to provide input into decision-making (such as government, communities, the private sector etc.);
- Supplement contextual analysis: Assist policymakers and others to be aware of aspects of environmental policy/natural resource management that may be overlooked, such as the relationship between policy/management practices and destructive conflict (including structural violence), who is and is not participating, and who is most at risk or most impacted; and

- Contribute to institutional reform: Assist stakeholders in designing and implementing the reform of formal and informal institutions to systematize the agreed changes

Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers) has the following questions for the Independent Expert:

Do you have any plans to consider the role that peacebuilding approaches can play in realising procedural rights and therefore in helping to achieve both substantive rights and effective environmental policy?

Have you considered looking at how groups such as small farmers, rural communities and marginalised sections of society, can effectively participate in consultation and decision-making processes that relate to their environment?