

To: Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

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Input to the Report *Covid-19 Recovery and Indigenous Peoples' Rights*

The communities of Indigenous Peoples of Russia, as all other communities, have found themselves facing the challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Indigenous Peoples of Russia benefited from the general measures aimed at preventing the spread of the pandemic introduced by the government. The package of measures included, *inter alia*, epidemiological monitoring conducted on a daily basis, providing medical evacuation coverage to those living in remote areas, deploying additional medical facilities etc. In general terms, these measures helped avoid a high increase in mortality among the Indigenous Peoples of Russia. However, it should be noted that the current Russian healthcare reporting system does not provide an ethnic breakdown of the COVID-19 patients. Therefore, the COVID-19 statistics regarding ethnic communities is unavailable.

Indigenous Peoples of Russia populating this country's remote areas, as well as those practicing a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life, find themselves in an especially vulnerable position in terms of the ongoing pandemic. This is why both the NGOs and the government put a special emphasis on seeing to it that their needs are met.

In Russia, it is common practice to provide information to the Indigenous Peoples, including those practicing a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life, regarding the prevention measures implemented, the additional mechanisms of support, specific aspects of the quarantine measures etc. Such information is available not only in Russian, but also in other languages spoken by the Indigenous Peoples, including *via* groups and virtual communities on mobile/messenger platforms, satellite communications, telephone hotlines for Indigenous Peoples, community newspapers, TV broadcasts etc.

A special role in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic was played by the Indigenous Peoples themselves. Indigenous NGOs such as *Saving Yugra (Spaseniye Yugry)* and *Yamal to Descendants (Yamal -- Potomkam)* have been disseminating information as regards the measures taken to combat the pandemic amongst Indigenous Peoples, waging awareness-raising campaigns, delivering food packages and safety apparel etc.

Regardless of the restrictions introduced by the government as part of an anti-pandemic effort, such branches of traditional economy as fishing and reindeer herding have been functioning as per their seasonal timetable. Federal authorities, having implemented a ban on hunting, have issued a specific recommendation to local governments not to impose restrictions upon traditional hunting practiced by the Indigenous Peoples. However, in some regions, traditional hunting is still subject to limitations owing to certain by-law discrepancies.

Indigenous Peoples, acting through a system of representation, are involved in the decision-making, including as regards rehabilitation and mitigation policies. Some regional executive bodies have Indigenous councils; Indigenous NGOs have entered a number of cooperation agreements with regional governors; in four regions, there are ombudsmen for Indigenous Peoples. Apart from this, Indigenous Peoples are represented in lawmaking bodies at all levels of government, namely, in the federal, regional and local ones.

Some practices introduced in various regions of Russia are cited below.

Irkutsk region. In April 2020, owing to the spread of COVID-19, fur auctions were postponed. Therefore, meat, hides and furs stocked up within the previous hunting

season could not be sold out. Indigenous communities faced a lack of refrigeration equipment needed for storing meat and fish; in certain localities, this issue has been addressed by digging storage pits in permafrost.

Hunting, fishing and collecting wild-growing herbs were either halted or performed exclusively to satisfy the needs of respective indigenous communities. In this light, the communities' funds needed for purchasing fuel and ammunition, as well as for meeting other operational needs, depleted. Given the aforementioned, the government of the Irkutsk region decided to allocate subsidies to the affected indigenous communities -- namely, to those experiencing a lack of operational funds and storage facilities for preserving game, fish, and animal pelts. The subsidies are intended to cover expenses incurred by indigenous communities when performing their traditional economic activities (reindeer herding, fishing, hunting etc.). Overall, in 2020, the funds allocated for these purposes amounted to 4.5 million rubles.

Nenets Autonomous District. In order to make healthcare more accessible to nomadic indigenous communities, *Red Chum (Krashyy Chum)*, a medical and social project, is being implemented on a yearly basis.

The project's multidisciplinary medical team includes 18 healthcare professionals: a neurologist, an endocrinologist, an otorhinolaryngologist, an ophthalmologist, a pediatrician, a psychiatrist (addictionist), a dermatologist, a dentist, an ultrasonographer, a general practitioner, a medical registrar, a clinical engineer, an X-ray laboratory technician, and paramedical practitioners. In the course of the recent decade, the project's medical team visited 14 remote areas of the region, including 11 agricultural production cooperatives and 4 family communities. Upon the onset of the pandemic, the *Red Chum* project was put to a halt.

Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug. Since 2019, the *IT Encampment (IT-Stoybishche)* project has been implemented in the region. As part of the project, steps are being taken to ensure access to telecommunication services in the areas populated by Indigenous Peoples.

This project helped maintain a regular contact with indigenous communities and people of indigenous descent living in remote areas outside settlements during the

COVID-19 pandemic. At present, some 1606 people living in 111 areas of traditional natural resource use, 3 encampments and 4 villages benefit from this project. Overall, 26 access points have been deployed as part of this project since its inception.

Khabarovsk Krai. Upon the introduction of restrictive measures relating to combating the spread of COVID-19, regional and municipal authorities launched a weekly monitoring system focusing on ensuring that:

- the authorities are in two-way contact with Indigenous Peoples, including those practicing a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life;

- indigenous communities have access to public services, such as, *inter alia*, expedient medical aid, provision of pharmaceuticals, and timely medical evacuation (followed by re-evacuation of patients back to their encampments, if necessary);

- such communities have ample opportunities to replenish their stock of foodstuffs and essential goods, including fuel and ammunition required to perform their traditional economic activities;

- children of indigenous descent living in the areas outside settlements, in the encampments, at boarding schools etc. enjoy full access to educational services;

- other specific needs of the Indigenous Peoples are promptly and effectively addressed.

Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District.

On 26 February 2021, a vaccination campaign targeting indigenous communities to prevent the spread of COVID-19 was launched. Immunization posts were deployed alongside the migration routes of reindeer herds to provide herders with an opportunity to immunize themselves from the infection without having to move far away from their encampments. The first such route passes along the road connecting the cities of Salekhard and Nadym. Reindeer herders have been informed of this fact prior to the deployment. More than 100 individuals were vaccinated at the mentioned immunization post within the first day of its operation. It should be underlined that giving the members of Yamal nomadic indigenous communities an opportunity to protect themselves from COVID-19 without having to leave their respective encampments and reindeer herds is of considerable importance. Only a few of them

can find time to visit immunization posts located in a city or a village. In this light, the Yamal authorities made a decision to deploy such posts in the tundra. Under the existing procedure, before administering a dose of vaccine to a patient, a physician conducts a health examination. In case that influenza symptoms are present, a patient is issued a free package of medicine and given the recommendation to postpone vaccination until recovery. Those who live in the tundra are known to incur a higher risk of developing bronchopulmonary diseases. In addition, harsh weather conditions often prevent medics from reaching the affected herder encampments in time. Therefore, delivering vaccine to nomadic indigenous communities is a top priority.