

**Subject: Request for Review of the Appointment of Ms. Antonina Gorbunova to
the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

29 May 2026

TO: Ambassador Sidharto Reza Suryodipuro, President of HRC

Cc: Members of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:

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Dear President of the Human Rights Council,

The International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia (ICIPR) respectfully writes to express serious concerns regarding the continued participation of Ms. Antonina Gorbunova as a member of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP).

As Administrative Chair of the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), Ms. Gorbunova occupies a leadership position within an organization whose independence and representational legitimacy have been the subject of longstanding concern among Indigenous rights defenders from the Russian Federation. These concerns have become particularly acute in the context of increasing restrictions on independent Indigenous activism and civic participation in Russia.

We respectfully request that the Human Rights Council and EMRIP review whether Ms. Gorbunova continues to satisfy the standards of independence, impartiality, integrity, and commitment to the protection of Indigenous rights expected of individuals entrusted with advancing and protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples globally.

Our concerns are based on several factors:

1. Leadership role in RAIPON and questions of independence

Following the 2013 restructuring of RAIPON and subsequent leadership changes, numerous Indigenous activists and organizations have questioned the organization's institutional capacity to represent Indigenous interests autonomously from state authorities and to reflect the diversity of views that exist among Indigenous communities.

As a member of RAIPON's leadership, Ms. Gorbunova occupies a senior position within an organization that has increasingly aligned itself with official state narratives and positions.¹

EMRIP members are expected to act independently and in the interests of Indigenous Peoples. We are concerned that Ms. Gorbunova's institutional position raises questions regarding her ability to exercise independent judgment free from political influence.

2. Abandonment of Indigenous human rights defenders

Our concerns became particularly acute following the 17 December 2025 criminal proceedings initiated against 17 Indigenous activists and representatives of independent Indigenous organizations.²

At a moment when peaceful Indigenous rights defenders, environmental advocates, and representatives of independent Indigenous organizations faced severe criminal accusations, RAIPON did not advocate for due process protections, civic freedoms, or the protection of Indigenous participation. Instead, it publicly declared that it had "no moral right" to defend them before any judicial determination had been made.³

The arrest and prosecution of Indigenous activists in the Russian Federation has become one of the most serious challenges facing Indigenous communities in recent years. The public withdrawal of support from Indigenous activists at a moment of acute vulnerability calls into question whether RAIPON continues to fulfill a representative function on behalf of Indigenous Peoples.

The test of Indigenous representation is not participation in international forums alone, but the willingness and ability to defend Indigenous rights and Indigenous civic space when those rights come into tension with state priorities.

3. Delegitimization of Independent leaders

The January 2026 statement from RAIPON went beyond declining to support the detained activists. It questioned the legitimacy of independent Indigenous organizations and asserted that they lacked a mandate to speak internationally on behalf of Indigenous Peoples of Russia. It further portrayed independent Indigenous organizations and activists as participants in projects directed against the Russian state. In doing so, RAIPON did not merely remain silent regarding the prosecution of Indigenous activists; it actively contributed to the delegitimization AND CRIMINALIZATION of alternative Indigenous representation.⁴

4. Use of International Indigenous Rights Standards to Restrict Indigenous Participation

Particularly alarming was RAIPON's reliance on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to discredit peaceful Indigenous activists and organizations. Rather than serving as a shield protecting Indigenous rights defenders, the Declaration was invoked as a justification for their exclusion. A human-rights mechanism created to protect Indigenous Peoples was turned against them.

5. Alignment with State Narratives Regarding the War in Ukraine

These developments must also be understood in the broader context of Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine.

RAIPON has publicly aligned itself with state narratives regarding the war and has not publicly addressed the consequences of the conflict for Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine, including Crimean Tatars and other Indigenous communities. Any public support for, justification of, or alignment with policies contributing to harm against Indigenous communities is difficult to reconcile with the spirit and principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.⁵

Implications for the Integrity of EMRIP

The legitimacy of international Indigenous rights institutions depends not only on formal representation, but also on the independence and accountability of those who speak in the name of Indigenous Peoples.

Membership in EMRIP carries responsibilities not only of expertise, but of demonstrated commitment to the protection of Indigenous rights, Indigenous participation, and the legitimacy of diverse Indigenous voices. The conduct described above raises serious questions regarding whether these standards continue to be met.

In light of these concerns, we respectfully request:

- A review of Ms. Gorbunova's compliance with standards of independence and impartiality applicable to EMRIP members;
- Consideration of information provided by independent Indigenous organizations and rights defenders from the Russian Federation;
- An assessment of whether her continued participation contributes to or undermines confidence in the credibility and integrity of the Expert Mechanism;
- Consultation with independent Indigenous organizations and Indigenous human rights defenders from the Russian Federation regarding concerns surrounding representation and participation;
- Appropriate measures to preserve confidence in the credibility, independence, and legitimacy of the Expert Mechanism.

We thank you for your attention to this matter and remain available to provide further documentation and information.

References:

¹ Arctida, "National Activists Turned Extremists", in *They Work for the Benefit of the Elite*, available at: <https://arctida.io/en/projects/oni-rabotayut-na-blago-verhushki>

² Open letter signed by more than 100 organizations calling for the release of Daria Egereva and Natalia Leongardt, available at: <https://www.daria-egereva.org/post/over-100-organizations-call-for-the-release-of-daria-egereva-and-natalia-leongardt>

³ Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), *Statement regarding the prosecution of Indigenous activists*, Indigenous Russia, available at: <https://indigenous-russia.com/archives/45718>

⁴ International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia (ICIPR), *The Crime of Being Indigenous 2026: Report on the Criminalization of Indigenous Activists in the Russian Federation*, available at: <https://icpr.international/archives/1386>

⁵ Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), *Statement expressing support for the decision of President Vladimir Putin to commence military operations in Ukraine*, Indigenous Russia, available at: <https://indigenous-russia.com/archives/19434>