

## **Promoting sustainable development of nomadic peoples in Mongolia**

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Madam Chairperson,  
Distinguished participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to thank the Human Rights Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for organizing this important event. I also thank for the invitation for me to participate and speak at this forum. You provided me with an opportunity to bring to your attention the voice of the nomadic people of Mongolia. I work in Bulgan province – some 500 km away from the capital. My daily struggle is to support the well-being of nomads by protecting and implementing the right to health of nomadic people in Bulgan province.

Before talking about the sustainable development for Mongolian nomads, I would like to describe briefly about the nomadic life in Mongolia.

For many centuries, the people of the steppes have lived a pastoral way of life, moving in the search of best pastures and campsites. They live by and for their livestock. Today, approximately half of Mongolia's population is still roaming the vast plains. Nomadic life thrives in summer and survives in winter. Considering climatic conditions, especially during the winter, such lifestyle may seem to the outside world to be a very hard way of living. However, Mongolians have developed for centuries such qualities as strength and resilience that are essential for survival in this harsh nature, which is their cherished homeland.

Traditionally, Mongolian nomads raise 5 species of livestock: horses, cows or yaks, sheep, goats and camels. The Tsaatan people, who live in the remote forest in the northern Mongolia, raise reindeers.

Nomadic families usually live in small clans and move around the area of 50 to 100 kilometers, at least twice a year, in spring and at the beginning of winter.

Daily life of nomads is devoted to caring after their livestock – watching over, milking, shearing or combing animals. The majority of Mongolians in rural areas live in the Ger, traditional dwelling that has been adapted over the centuries to the realities of nomadic life in harsh steppes. It is warm in winter and cool in summer, easy to dismount and transport, that is so important for nomads during their all-year-around migration.

Historically, Mongolian nomads experienced socio-political changes owing to internal and external factors.

After the establishment of the modern Mongolia in 1921, all animals owned by nomads were moved under the control of cooperatives, and later under the ownership of the State. Nomads

were herding state-owned property until the democratic revolution, which took place in 1990. As a result of large-scale privatization process that began after the democratic revolution, nearly all of the state-owned livestock were given back to the ownership of herders. This yielded a rapid increase in the numbers of herders and animals alike. Of course, it was a good development for herders who became owners of the livestock capital. On the other hand, the privatization of livestock led to decreased state support in veterinary, education, health and other services, which affected negatively on both human and animal populations. For example, children of school age, mainly boys, dropped off schools in order to help parents in raising animals. This had a negative impact on the enjoyment of the right to education and the right to development of young generation.

The increased number of animals led to the pastoral overgrazing, land degradation and desertification. Moreover, climate changes such as extreme cold blizzard and heavy snowfall, known in Mongolian as Dzud, droughts, strong winds and flooding have occurred frequently in Mongolia for the recent past years. The Dzud and drought that lasted from 2001 to 2003 killed some 11 million animals. As I explained above, herders are dependent and survive on animal breeding. It is common for herders - men, women and children alike - to sacrifice their life to save their animals. Many still frozen to death while searching for their animals lost in severe and cold winter.

A large number of herders who lost their animals during harsh winter migrated to cities for survival and search for jobs. Herders did not have the required education and skills; hence less opportunity to find decent jobs. This added to increased poverty and unemployment in Mongolia.

Besides natural phenomena, air temperature in Mongolia is increasing as a result of global warming. For the last 30 years temperature went up by 2 degrees. This resulted in drying up many rivers, streams and lakes in Mongolia.

Next point is mining boom in Mongolia. There are more than 400 different minerals in Mongolia and exploration works are under way in many areas, especially in southern Mongolia. Expanding extractive industry in Mongolia is destroying pastureland and polluting water sources, air and environment. This again is negatively affecting both human and animal populations. Due to unsafe water source, polluted air and environment, non-communicable diseases are increasing among the herders. Herders become marginalized and vulnerable because of their poor knowledge and education, unhealthy lifestyle and remote location that hinders their access to basic social and health services.

Here, let me touch briefly the health issues of nomadic people. We face many problems in ensuring better health service to nomads. First, nomads neglect their health. Livestock and animal breeding is more important than looking after their health. Therefore, we organize many educational and learning activities for nomads to change their mentality. Second, the health services in provinces are not adequate and of poor quality. For example, we have shortage of highly educated doctors in the province. The ratio of patients is very high compared to the number of available doctors. Furthermore, hospitals and health centers do not have the adequate and modern medical equipment. The health and pension insurance in Mongolia is compulsory for the state employees and also for the contracted workers. The nomads are covered under the

above-mentioned insurance scheme, but on voluntary basis because they are not regularly paid workers. In real life, most of them are not covered by the insurance and are therefore excluded from insurance benefits.

We have a great challenge here. How to preserve the nomadic culture while improving the well being of nomads? The Government of Mongolia is making efforts and undertaking a number of programs to support the herders and the livestock sector by diverting funds from the state budget. It is also actively mobilizing the financial and other resources allocated by international organizations and donor countries to address this matter.

Nevertheless, I believe that promotion of the sustainable development of nomadic people in Mongolia requires multi-faceted approach and solutions that address socio-economic, development, human rights and environmental aspects of nomadic life. We need a human rights-based approach in order to ensure sustainable development of nomadic people. This means that all government and non-government programmes aimed at assisting the herders and protecting the nomadic way of life should integrate the human rights concerns and needs of nomadic people. I also think that the right to development framework is very important to sustainable development of nomads. We must ensure the active, free and meaningful participation of nomads in making decisions that affect their livelihood. We should support civil society and social movements in support of ensuring social justice and equity for the nomads. We also need to work in order to support meaningful participation of nomads in development and fair distribution of the benefits of development. This requires a political will and commitment from the government and sustained efforts and attention from civil society and social movements. In conclusion, I thank for your attention and look forward to your ideas and advice to assist us in this endeavor.

Thank you.