



Rapa Nui, June 4th, 2026

To: Dr. Albert K. Barume

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Re: Urgent appeal — proposed reform to Chile's Indigenous Law No. 19.253 threatening the ancestral land, sacred sites, and self-determination of the Rapa Nui People (Easter Island)

Dear Dr. Barume,

On behalf of the Rapa Nui People, I respectfully write to express my deep concern and alarm and to bring to your urgent attention a proposed reform by the State of Chile that places the ancestral land of Rapa Nui (Easter Island) at imminent risk of dispossession.

The measure. On 1 June 2026, in his first address to the National Congress, the President of Chile announced a reform to Indigenous Law No. 19.253 intended to remove the protective restrictions on indigenous land so that it may be leased and mortgaged on the same terms as ordinary property. Under the law as it stands, such land may be leased or mortgaged only within the same indigenous group, and subsistence land may not be charged at all. Eliminating that protection would allow ancestral land to be mortgaged to banks and leased to non-indigenous and foreign oligarchic parties; foreclosure or long-term lease would become a lawful route to the permanent loss of indigenous territory. The measure has been announced but not yet enacted, and is said to be subject to a consultation process — which is precisely why timely international attention is critical.

Why is this grave for Rapa Nui? Rapa Nui holds more than 25,000 archaeological and sacred sites, including over 1,000 moai and 703 ahu. Law 19.253 itself defines indigenous land as “the principal foundation of the existence and culture” of the people. For Rapa Nui, the loss of land is the loss of an irreplaceable living heritage and of our mother earth.

Historical context the State cannot ignore. The relationship between the Kingdom of Rapa Nui and the Republic of Chile rests on the act of 9 September 1888, which exists in two non-identical versions. The Spanish text proclaimed a “full, entire and unreserved cession of sovereignty”; the Rapanui-language text spoke only of “friend of the place,” a bond of friendship and protection: in the Rapanui understanding the King ceded only the administration of the island — reserving his royal investiture and the territorial integrity of Rapa Nui, in exchange for protection — and ceded neither sovereignty nor land. Chile's own Commission for Historical Truth and New Deal with Indigenous Peoples (2003) recorded that the Rapanui text “does not speak of ceding land or its property.” In 1933 the State nonetheless registered the entire island to its Treasury as “land without owner.” The Rapa Nui People have never consented to the alienation of their land: King Riro Kāinga died in Valparaíso in 1898 while defending the island's sovereignty; more than a century later, on 8 August 2011, the Rapa Nui Parliament restored that authority by proclaiming Valentino Riroroko Tuki, grandson of Riro Kāinga, as King, and in his name an action was brought to annul the 1888 act. The 2026 reform would impose precisely what the Rapa Nui have refused for over a century.

International standards engaged. The proposed reform raises serious concerns under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples — including the rights to lands, territories and resources (arts. 25–28), protection against forced removal and dispossession (art. 10), and the requirement of free, prior and informed consent before adopting measures that may affect indigenous peoples (arts. 19 and 32) — as well as ILO Convention No. 169 (arts. 6, 13–17), to which Chile is a party. I note the particular relevance of your current thematic work on the demarcation, registration and titling of indigenous lands and on free, prior and informed consent. I further note that the very basis of Chilean sovereignty over Rapa Nui is contested: scholarship and the Rapa Nui Parliament hold that sovereignty was never validly ceded in 1888, but consolidated through effective occupation only after 1966 — that is, after self-determination had already become a binding right — and that the Rapa Nui are a people entitled to political self-determination, not merely an “ethnicity” confined to cultural rights.

This is neither a new nor an isolated claim. The situation of the Rapa Nui Nation is already before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (Petition P-172-15, Rapa Nui People), and has previously been brought before the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; available domestic remedies within Chile have been exhausted, and a fact-finding mission has been requested.

The UN treaty bodies have already spoken. In its 2013 concluding observations on Chile (CERD/C/CHL/CO/19-21), the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination urged the State to resolve indigenous land conflicts and to guarantee the full restitution of ancestral property and effective control over ancestral lands, territories and natural resources; to carry out free, prior and informed consultation before any measure affecting indigenous peoples; to strengthen indigenous participation and self-government; to protect indigenous languages, cultural identity and traditional authorities; and to ensure access to justice without discrimination. As a recognized Polynesian indigenous people, the Rapa Nui fall squarely within these recommendations. I respectfully urge that this 2013 exhortation — above all the full and complete restitution of ancestral Rapa Nui property — now be complied with, and not reversed by a reform that would instead expose that property to mortgage and alienation.

I respectfully request that you:

- Acknowledge the Kingdom of Rapa Nui. Transmit a communication to the Government of Chile seeking clarification of the proposed reform and recalling its obligations under UNDRIP and ILO Convention No. 169;
- Call on the State to refrain from advancing any reform that would permit the mortgage, lease, or alienation of ancestral indigenous land to parties outside the community;
- Urge the State of Chile to comply with the 2013 CERD concluding observations (CERD/C/CHL/CO/19-21), and in particular to carry out the full restitution of, and effective control over, the ancestral lands, territories and resources of the Rapa Nui People;
- Consider including the situation of the Rapa Nui Nation in your forthcoming thematic and country reporting, and consider engagement with, or a visit to, the affected community;
- In accordance with international law, Chile must collaborate with and finance the self-determination of the Rapa Nui Nation, as well as the restoration of Rapa Nui society — which has been subjected to destruction for over a century to date.

I remain at your disposal to provide any further documentation, including the petition pending before the Inter-American Commission (P-172-15), the CERD concluding observations on Chile (2013), primary records held by the National Library of Chile, and the proceedings before the courts of Valparaíso. I attach the public petition, a list of historical sources, and a copy of the communication addressed to the President of the Republic of Chile requesting the withdrawal of the reform.

Please accept, Dr. Barume, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Respectfully,

Erity Teave Hey

Vice President

Parlamento Rapa Nui

Enclosures:

1. Public petition — “Protect Rapa Nui Land”
2. List of historical sources
3. Copy of the letter addressed to the President of the Republic of Chile