

System-wide action plan for ensuring a coherent approach to achieving the ends of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

October 2015

System wide action plan

I. Introduction

1. Background

The outcome document of the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples contains a series of commitments calling for multifaceted action by a range of actors, first and foremost Member States, but also the United Nations system. Among these is a request that the Secretary-General develop a system wide action plan to ensure a coherent approach to achieving the ends of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/69/2, paragraph 31¹). The outcome document also requests the designation of an existing senior official of the UN system responsible for coordinating the action plan, raising awareness of the rights of indigenous peoples at the highest possible level, as well as increasing the coherence of the activities of the UN system in this regard. The Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs was designated to this position and has coordinated the development of this action plan².

In preparation of the action plan and under the guidance of the Under-Secretary-General, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) organized consultations with Member States, indigenous peoples, representatives of UN agencies, funds and programmes, the three UN mechanisms with specific mandates concerning indigenous peoples and others. Throughout these consultations the need for further awareness-raising on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and for capacity-building to implement its provisions has been highlighted as a central concern. This concern has been raised in relation to the UN system as well as among Member States, indigenous peoples themselves and the broader societies in which they live. The consultations also identified the need for concerted action to implement the Declaration, especially at the country level. The full and effective participation of indigenous people in processes that affect them is another issue that has been a priority for indigenous peoples and is a principle that is recognized and supported by Member States. The action plan seeks to address these issues.

Based on the feedback received, the plan focuses on the following action areas: (1) raise awareness on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and indigenous issues; (2) support the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, particularly at the country level; (3) Support the realisation of indigenous peoples' rights in the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; (4) conduct

¹ Full text of paragraph 31: *We request the Secretary-General, in consultation and cooperation with indigenous peoples, the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues and Member States, to begin the development, within existing resources, of a system-wide action plan to ensure a coherent approach to achieving the ends of the Declaration and to report to the General Assembly at its seventieth session, through the Economic and Social Council, on progress made. We invite the Secretary-General to accord, by the end of the seventieth session of the Assembly, an existing senior official of the United Nations system, with access to the highest levels of decision-making within the system, responsibility for coordinating the action plan, raising awareness of the rights of indigenous peoples at the highest possible level and increasing the coherence of the activities of the system in this regard.*

² This action plan was developed by the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues (IASG) over the course of 10 months in 2015 and was finalized at the annual meeting of the IASG on 26-27 October 2015. It was introduced by the Secretary-General to the Chief Executives Board at its meeting on 18 December 2015.

a mapping exercise of existing policies, standards, guidelines, activities, resources and capacities within the UN and multilateral system to identify opportunities and gaps; (5) develop capacities of States, indigenous peoples, civil society and UN personnel at all levels; and (6) support the participation of indigenous peoples in processes that affect them. The primary aim of this action plan is to increase UN system coherence in addressing the rights and well-being of indigenous peoples in its work, including in support of Member States, with the ultimate goal of implementing, with the effective participation of indigenous peoples, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at all levels.

This action plan is aimed to promote improved support to Member States as well as indigenous peoples themselves. Particular attention is paid to the UN system using its convening capacity to facilitate dialogue and cooperation between state actors and indigenous peoples, promoting indigenous peoples' participation in global, regional and national processes that affect them, while supporting Member States to take into account indigenous peoples' rights and views in line with international standards.

2. Guiding framework

In accordance with the mandate given by the General Assembly, and as reflected in the action areas below, the action plan is focused on promoting the achievement of the ends of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Declaration defines the minimum standards necessary for the survival, dignity and well-being of indigenous peoples. It is a definitive expression of the rights of indigenous peoples as recognized by the United Nations General Assembly, identifying their rights in the context of a comprehensive range of thematic areas, including health, education, culture, land rights, traditional livelihoods, traditional knowledge and collective rights. The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples enshrines the right to self-determination and development with culture and identity.

This action plan falls clearly within the letter and spirit of articles 41 and 42 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in addressing all the articles of the Declaration within each agency's respective mandates.

Article 41

The organs and specialized agencies of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations shall contribute to the full realization of the provisions of this Declaration through the mobilization, inter alia, of financial cooperation and technical assistance. Ways and means of ensuring participation of indigenous peoples on issues affecting them shall be established.

Article 42

The United Nations, its bodies, including the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and specialized agencies, including at the country level, and States shall promote respect for and full application of the provisions of this Declaration and follow up the effectiveness of this Declaration.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets the global development agenda and impacts on the way the international community will work with indigenous peoples over the coming years. The 2030 Agenda has inequalities as its centerpiece. The overall aim of the new Agenda is “to leave no one behind” by “reaching the furthest behind first” and by ensuring that SDG targets are met “for all nationals and peoples and for all segments of society”.

It reaffirms the responsibility of all States, to “respect, protect and promote human rights, without distinction of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national and social origin, property, birth, disability or other status”. The open-ended nature of the list constitutes an implicit recognition that all human beings are born free and equal and thereby ensures consistency with existing human rights standards on non-discrimination.

The action plan ultimately aims at contributing to the realization of indigenous peoples’ rights at the country level through reinforced support by the UN system to Member States in this regard. The UN Indigenous Peoples Partnership (UNIPP) can be one of the key means, amongst others, to promote coherence and joint programming at the country level and therefore it is important to strengthen the partnership and its scope.

Building upon already existing initiatives within the UN system, the action plan promotes awareness, understanding and better and more effective use of guidelines and resource material developed by the UN System on indigenous peoples’ issues, including the United Nations Development Group’s Guidelines on Indigenous Peoples’ Issues (UNDG Guidelines) and its related plan of action, the Resource Kit on Indigenous Peoples’ Issues. These resources were designed to assist the system in mainstreaming and integrating indigenous peoples’ issues in processes in UN operational activities, taking into account the provisions of the Declaration and International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169, along with other relevant instruments. The action plan also builds on the recommendations developed by the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues in 2008 on integrating the Declaration and the Convention into the work of the UN system (E/C.19/2008/CRP.7).

The United Nations system’s work on indigenous peoples’ issues is guided by the five Country Programming Principles of the UNDG, namely— the human rights-based approach; gender equality; environmental sustainability; results-based management; and capacity development.

Under a human rights-based approach, the plans, policies and processes of development are anchored in a system of rights and corresponding obligations established by international law, including all civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, labour rights and the right to development. A human rights-based approach to programming ensures that human rights standards and principles, such as equality and non-discrimination, participation and accountability, guide all phases of the programming process and facilitates a sharp focus on developing capacity of duty-bearers to meet their obligations and that of rights-holders to claim their rights.

The principle of gender equality ensures that this action plan takes into account, the differential impacts of policies and programmes on women and men, and girls and boys and in particular, ensures that the multiple forms of discrimination that indigenous girls, adolescents and women experience are addressed through appropriate means identified in consultation with them, and that such measures advance their empowerment.

The principle of environmental sustainability ensures that development meets the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and that this action plan takes into account this inter-generational imperative. It will ensure recognition of the close link of environmental factors to the realization of rights and well-being of indigenous peoples, including indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge contributing to sustainable development, throughout the activities set out by this action plan.

This action plan builds on the momentum and spirit of the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples and to this end will promote partnership and collaboration between the UN system, civil society organizations, and multilateral bodies such as regional development banks and human rights special procedures and commissions.

This system wide action plan will contribute to the *fit for purpose* agenda by ensuring stronger linkages between the normative and operational work of the United Nations, increasing coordination and coherence in addressing the rights of indigenous peoples. It calls for strengthened United Nations senior level engagement, encouraging work with Member States in a spirit of partnership and cooperation to generate support for the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. As such this action plan implies the need to advance the rights and well-being of indigenous peoples, in the field and at headquarters, including by shared analysis, common strategies and greater accountability.

For this action plan to be effectively implemented at the country level, it is important that United Nations Resident Coordinators are empowered and supported from the highest levels at headquarters. Only by ensuring the adequate political traction both at the global and country level, will the dialogues and programmes between indigenous peoples, Member States and United Nations be fruitful in advancing the rights of indigenous peoples.

II. Elements of the action plan

1. Raise awareness of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

a. Conduct a high-level awareness raising initiative

The Secretary-General and other high level UN officials will use their good offices to raise awareness of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Drawing upon key messages to be drafted and relevant recommendations made by the international human rights system, the indigenous-specific UN mechanisms, and other relevant agencies, officials and spokespeople will reiterate the UN system's commitment to the Declaration and its provisions, and encourage ratification of ILO Convention No. 169. Activities will include advocacy and awareness-raising in speeches and statements, letters to UN Country Teams and others in the UN system, bilateral meetings with Member States and visits to indigenous peoples' communities. *Substantive support to the Office of the Secretary-General will be provided by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA).*

b. Develop a succinct set of key messages based on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

In this vein, messages will be developed that express the commitment of the UN system to the Declaration and to support its implementation, as per 1.a. These messages will be aimed at raising awareness and building support for the rights of indigenous peoples among all key stakeholders at all levels (Member States, UN personnel, relevant civil society organizations and the general public). The messages should be derived from the Declaration and should be presented in a coherent manner that is useful to policy makers and practitioners. *Messages will be developed by the UNDESA and the Department of Public Information (UNDPI) in collaboration with members of the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues.*

c. Develop and launch a media and outreach campaign

In support of the high-level awareness raising initiative and taking advantage of existing communications channels within the UN system, a media and outreach campaign should be developed and undertaken using social media, UN websites, UN radio, UNTV and other platforms, based on the agreed key messages. This could include infographics, photos, videos, exhibits, facts sheets, stories and opinion editorials by UN experts on indigenous peoples. This may also include the nomination of high-level or prominent champions of indigenous peoples, such as indigenous artists, actors, politicians or other public figures. This strategy will engage the network of United Nations information centers, services and offices in proactive promotion of UN activities vis-à-vis indigenous issues on country and regional levels. *This strategy will be developed by UNDPPI in close collaboration with UNDESA and in cooperation with other interested UN partners.*

2. Support the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, particularly at the country level

a. Support national partners in reform and implementation of legal frameworks, policies, strategies and plans to further the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, through joint programming and other initiatives

In the outcome document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, Member States committed to developing and implementing national action plans, strategies or other measures to achieve the ends of the Declaration. They also committed to taking measures at

the national level, including legislative, policy and administrative measures to achieving the ends of the Declaration. Building on these commitments, Member States invited United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to support the implementation of national action plans, strategies or other measures to achieve the ends of the Declaration. *UN Country Teams, UNDP and other agencies funds and programmes will engage with Member States to support and promote these activities in cooperation with other interested UN partners.*

b. Support the mainstreaming of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and International Labour Organization Convention No. 169 in national development plans and in the Common Country Assessment (CCA)/United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs)

In applying a human-rights based approach in its work with national partners, and through the UNDAFs in particular, UN Country Teams, in cooperation with other UN system partners, will promote the mainstreaming of indigenous peoples' rights. The UNDG programming principle of human rights-based approaches, the UNDG Guidelines on Indigenous Peoples' Issues and the Resource Kit on Indigenous Peoples' Issues provide a roadmap and tools for integrating indigenous peoples' issues in processes for programmes at the country level, including processes aimed at implementing the 2030 Development Agenda. UN Country Teams will through their work also promote recommendations pertaining to indigenous peoples emerging out of human rights mechanisms, including human rights treaty bodies, ILO supervisory bodies, special procedure mandates and the Universal Periodic Review. *Members of the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues will ensure that UN Country Teams have access to expertise, data and other relevant sources of information on the rights of indigenous peoples in the preparation of CCA/UNDAFs and 2030 Agenda national level processes.*

c. Promote the establishment or strengthening of consultative mechanisms and platforms of dialogue under the leadership of Resident Coordinators

These consultative mechanisms will inform the operational activities of the UN Country Teams. They will also promote regular dialogue between indigenous peoples, state actors, the private sector and other relevant entities to foster trust and to advance the rights of indigenous peoples. Dialogues may be held also at the regional and global level with relevant partners, such as intergovernmental regional mechanisms, development banks and regional inter-agency mechanisms. Support can also be delivered through the generation of evidence, analysis and knowledge exchanges related to indigenous peoples.

3. Support the realisation of indigenous peoples' rights in the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to leave no one behind and to reach the farthest behind first. As a general principle it is important to ensure that efforts by the UN system to assist Member States to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals include, where possible, a focus on indigenous peoples, who are among the furthest behind. Specifically the UN system should:

- a. Incorporate indigenous issues into programming to implement the 2030 Agenda and ensure such programming is consistent with the provisions of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;**
- b. Promote the participation of indigenous peoples in programmes, projects and other activities related to the implementation and review of the 2030 Development Agenda,**

including the participation of indigenous women, persons with disabilities, older persons, children and youth; and

- c. Where possible, ensure that information is gathered and disseminated on the progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda for indigenous peoples.**

4. Conduct a mapping of existing standards and guidelines, capacities, training materials and resources within the UN system, International Financial Institutions, and IASG members for the effective implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The UN system is already engaged in promoting the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples through a range of activities. These include the collection and dissemination of information on the situation of indigenous peoples, with particular emphasis on research, statistical data collection, policy development and analysis and reports to human rights bodies and mechanisms, and training materials. Some international agreements have adopted and are operationalizing indicators of relevance to indigenous peoples, such as those adopted for traditional knowledge. Several organizations have either adopted specific policies/mechanisms of engagement with indigenous peoples or are in the process of doing so.

A mapping exercise of this wealth of information will not only provide an overview of the UN system's activities related to indigenous peoples, but also support the creation of a central information hub on indigenous peoples' issues within the UN system, for use by all partners. This would serve the purpose of identifying existing resources for effective and coherent action on indigenous peoples' issues, and also facilitate the identification of gaps in knowledge and capacity for informed decision-making on further investments in evidence gathering and capacity development resources. For continuous updating of the proposed knowledge hub, *this information will be provided each year by members of the IASG and consolidated by UNDESA as part of the annual report to the annual sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and other fora as requested.*

5. Develop capacities of States, indigenous peoples, civil society and UN personnel

- a. Integrate indigenous peoples' issues into existing capacity development activities**

There is a wealth of training opportunities already provided by the UN system, including training in the human rights based approach to programming, results-based management, monitoring and evaluation and training in the specific fields of each UN entity. Indigenous issues should be incorporated into these capacity-development activities, as appropriate.

This should ensure, where appropriate and feasible: (1) common messaging in line with the Declaration; and (2) coordination within the UN system in terms of organization and production of materials. Capacity development will highlight the coherence and complementarity of the Declaration, ILO Convention No. 169 and UN core human rights treaties. *This will be implemented by all relevant organizations that conduct capacity development including the United Nations System Staff College.*

b. Develop the capacities of UN staff at all levels

Initiatives will include:

- **Technical capacity development** in revision/drafting of national policy inclusive and consistent with the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, ILO Convention No. 169 and human rights treaties and standards, and building on the UNDG Guidelines on Indigenous Peoples' Issues.
- **Regional/sub-regional training activities or programmes** carried out through the regional commissions and through the Regional Director's Team's Quality Support and Assurance Group (QSA). Collaboration in this regard with regional institutions like the regional banks and regional/sub-regional organizations that have programmes dealing with indigenous peoples shall be promoted.
- **Develop online capacity development on indigenous issues.** Online training and where possible accredited training, using train-the-trainer methodologies, are developed as tools aimed at and for UN staff.

c. Capacity development for Member State officials

Indigenous peoples and Member States have identified a lack of knowledge about indigenous peoples and their issues and rights as one of the major obstacles to the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Capacity development of Member State officials should be accommodated in projects that target indigenous peoples as well as other UN initiatives.

d. Training representatives of indigenous people's institutions/organizations

Some indigenous peoples lack the skills, access and resources to effectively advocate for their rights and well-being. It is important to focus specifically on indigenous peoples and especially those with a capacity to train others and disseminate information, from countries and/or communities that have limited access to resources. *OHCHR and WIPO have dedicated indigenous fellowship programmes while various other UN entities, including the Secretariat for the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Institute for Training and Research organize trainings for indigenous peoples.*

Support to indigenous-led capacity development through trainings should also be provided, and integrated in development initiatives targeting indigenous peoples. All capacity development exercises aimed at indigenous peoples should include the participation of indigenous women as well as indigenous persons with disabilities and indigenous children and youth.

6. Advance the participation of indigenous peoples in UN processes

Although the participation of indigenous peoples' representatives and institutions in meetings of relevant UN bodies is a matter that the General Assembly will continue to consider, the UN system can take concrete and practical steps towards increased full and effective participation in processes that affect them. This can include consultative mechanisms, funds, and tools for seeking free, prior and informed consent and other means for facilitating full and effective participation of indigenous peoples including indigenous women, Elders, persons with disabilities as well as indigenous children and youth.