



OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 20TH SESSION OF THE PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Excellencies,
Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum,
Representatives of Indigenous Peoples,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great privilege to address you today at the opening ceremony of the 20th session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. I had hoped, that we would be able to meet together at an informal hearing, in line with GA Resolution 71/321, however I understand, and respect your request to postpone this interaction until it is safe to convene a large gathering in-person.

This has indeed been a challenging year; however, the COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly difficult for indigenous peoples who suffer from underlying health issues, poverty and food insecurity at rates disproportionately higher than the general population.

I commend the indigenous peoples' organizations that rallied to protect isolated communities with less access to healthcare.

Ladies and gentlemen,



It is clear from your participation in the regional dialogues, that in order to ensure *Vaccines for All*, we must disseminate vaccines in a manner that is culturally appropriate and leaves no one behind. This is critical if we are to reach the most vulnerable and the elderly.

If we fail to do so, we risk not only losing beloved members of communities but also the elders who uphold traditions, cultures, and languages. In some communities, the elderly are the last speakers of endangered languages. The intrinsic link between language and identity is one of great importance, and one which I trust will be promoted throughout the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, beginning next year.

Furthermore, throughout planning efforts to recover better, we must ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making processes that facilitate the full engagement of indigenous peoples.

In our socio-economic recovery, we must address the impact that market closures and ecotourism disruption has had on indigenous peoples.

As we prepare for the next pandemic, we must engage indigenous communities who are at a higher risk for emerging infectious diseases as a result of the destruction of ecosystems from extractive industries and climate change.



In addressing the climate crisis, we must involve indigenous people who are the stewards of more than 80% of our biodiversity worldwide.

As we work to end gender-based violence and achieve gender equality around the world, we must engage indigenous women who experience sexual and gender-based violence at a greater rate, and have less access to education, employment and justice, than other women.

The fact is, decision-makers should reflect the population who is governed by the decisions made. This is the only approach that will end stigmatization, discrimination, and cultural threats and improve access to vital services such as education, healthcare, and justice.

Considering the increasing migration of indigenous peoples to urban areas, I encourage all indigenous peoples here today to engage in the upcoming Special Session Against Corruption in June, and the high-level dialogue on urban safety, security and good governance which takes place this Thursday.

I also encourage policymakers in urban areas to enable the realization of individual and collective rights including the right to self-autonomy, the maintenance of identity, as well as the creation of decent work that is culturally appropriate. This is key to realising sustainable, self-determined development in the urban environment.



Ladies and gentlemen,

The Permanent Forum provides a central channel for sharing first-hand experience, advice, and recommendations on indigenous issues, which is essential to maintaining peace, justice and strong institutions. This advice must be heard and heeded by governments in order to create lasting change. I urge all Member States to promote respect for, and fully apply, the provisions of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Persons.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Sustainable Development Goal 16 represents the original aspirations of the founders of the United Nations, as they set out to create a multilateral system founded upon peace, justice, strong institutions, and the equal dignity and worth of each person.

75 years later, in this Decade of Action to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, we need to recommit to these principles. This means including the voices of those who have, for too long, been silenced.

Our strength lies in our diversity. If we fail to realise this, we will not only fail indigenous communities, but everyone, everywhere.

I thank you all for your tireless commitment to your communities, and creating a better world for all. I look forward to working with you for the remainder of the 75th session.



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