

# **MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

**9 August 2021**

**Ms. Anne Nuorgam,**

**Chair of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

Today we celebrate the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. In 1992, the United Nations General Assembly decided that 9 of August each year will be commemorated as the International Day. It was celebrated for the first time at the beginning of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. Since then, indigenous peoples and governments commemorate this historic day. It is an occasion to assess the situation of the rights of indigenous peoples, the effectiveness of implementation measures enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and think about where we are going in years to come.

For indigenous peoples around the world who number more than 476 million, the journey to get international recognition, first by the League of Nations and then the United Nations of our individual and collective rights was long and difficult. Indigenous peoples with the support of NGOs and academia met at the Working Group on Indigenous Populations with fellow delegates from other parts of the world and representatives of Member States, and together they began to work on the first drafts and negotiations of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was adopted in 2007 by the General Assembly.

In the years since the adoption of the UN Declaration, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples have engaged in many processes at the national, regional and international levels to facilitate the relationship between States and indigenous peoples in accordance with their mandates. Additionally, the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples mandated the General Assembly to initiate the process of enhancing the participation of indigenous peoples' representatives and institutions in meetings of relevant United Nations bodies on issues affecting them. This process has allowed Member States and

Indigenous Peoples to hear each other's concerns and priorities on the importance of agreeing to the formal recognition of indigenous peoples at the United Nations.

While continuing this work, now even more, in the face of the inequalities laid bare during this COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations must take action to respond to the current situation and make the aspiration of peoples everywhere a reality. It is time to renew commitments and build and redesign a new social contract to ensure that no one is left behind, including indigenous peoples. The road map to end decades of colonialism and patriarchy should be guided by international instruments such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for peace and prosperity for all on a healthy planet.

In some countries, progress has been made in terms of the adoption of legal reforms towards the recognition of indigenous peoples' legal status, indigenous languages and cultures, their lands and territories, and their collective and individual rights. But there are also many examples of governments making decisions without the genuine participation of indigenous peoples to obtain their free, prior and informed consent. In too many cases, policies, programmes and major development projects are imposed. Such actions lead to the criminalization of indigenous peoples when they exercise their right to self-determination, including over their lands and territories. It is time to move from formalization on paper to the realization of human rights in action to end discrimination, racism, oppression, marginalization, and exploitation.

On this occasion, I would like to call on governments at all levels to:

- Establish and reinforce mechanisms with the genuine participation of indigenous peoples based on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- Recognize indigenous peoples as distinct peoples and not as marginalized and vulnerable groups, valuing their diversity and distinctiveness because of the valuable contributions they can make for the betterment of all. Indigenous languages, cultural practices, and wisdom, combined with science and technology can help to respond to the climate crisis, and indigenous traditional knowledge and practices of sustainable and healthy agriculture are beneficial for food sovereignty;

- Recognize and support indigenous peoples' own institutions and self-governance structures to empower them to take control of their own affairs in all aspects of their lives; and,
- Revisit and live up to past commitments in order to renew and strengthen our present and future relationships, both as peoples and nations.

Indeed, it is time for Member States to recognize that the struggles of indigenous peoples and their organizations can no longer be ignored as they were during the era of national state construction.

Let us all commemorate this Indigenous Peoples' Day by renewing the commitments made for the full application and operationalization of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. You can count on the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in this endeavor.

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