

**MR. LIU ZHENMIN
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS,
AND SENIOR OFFICIAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM
TO COORDINATE FOLLOW UP TO THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON INDIGENOUS
PEOPLES**

OPENING SESSION OF THE TWENTY-FIRST SESSION OF
THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

New York, 25 April 2022

To be delivered by ASG Francesca Spatolisano

**Distinguished Chairperson, Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous
Issues,**

**Distinguished Representatives of Member States, Indigenous Peoples’
Organizations, UN system entities, intergovernmental organizations and civil
society,**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

**It gives me great pleasure to be here at the opening of the 21st session of
the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. I wish to extend a warm
welcome to you all. I am pleased to see many representatives present here in
the room today, but also acknowledge the challenges faced by many of you
joining us online whom unfortunately, could not make the journey to New
York.**

The sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues offer a space for global dialogue among Indigenous Peoples, Member States, UN entities and other stakeholders to promote and strengthen the implementation of the rights and development of indigenous peoples around the world.

The theme of this session - *Indigenous peoples, business, autonomy, and the human rights principles of due diligence including free, prior and informed consent* – is aimed at highlighting the rights of indigenous peoples to self-determination, lands, territories, and resources including in business contexts. Too often these rights are violated for economic gain - including mining, conservation, mega-dams, and other investments activities. Laws and project activities related to business development are frequently designed and implemented without any meaningful participation of indigenous peoples, nor consideration of their free, prior, and informed consent.

It was recently reported that indigenous peoples customarily claim and manage over 50 per cent of the world's land, while they legally own only 10 per cent. As a result, at least 40 per cent of the world's land surface – around 5 billion hectares – remain unprotected and vulnerable to commercial pressures, including land grabbing by more powerful entities, and environmental destruction.

When indigenous communities resist harmful business activities, they are often faced with extreme reprisals. In 2020, a global analysis recorded 331 killings of human rights defenders – 69 per cent of them working on land,

indigenous peoples and environmental rights and 26 per cent specifically defending indigenous peoples' rights. These figures are startling.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs is proud to provide support to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The Under-Secretary-General has been designated as the senior UN official responsible for following up on the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples and the implementation of the System Wide Action Plan of 2015 on Indigenous Peoples, a plan designed to guide the UN system in ensuring a coherent approach to achieving the ends of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

UN entities continue to implement the System-Wide Action Plan on Indigenous Peoples and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through an Inter-agency support group. Over the past year, UN entities have worked together to focus on improving the UN response to the protection of indigenous human rights defenders, to improve engagement with UN Country Teams on indigenous issues, and to seek ways to enhance the participation of indigenous peoples in various UN processes. Our response will continue to be guided by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the outcome document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank the Member States that have generously contributed to the Trust Fund on Indigenous Issues in 2022. It is through this Trust Fund that

we can support the year-round work of the Permanent Forum and follow-up to its recommendations as well as the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

DESA continues to engage in promoting the rights of indigenous peoples, particularly in the context of the 2030 Agenda. We are here to support your efforts. I look forward to following your deliberations over the coming two weeks, and to hearing your proposals and recommendations on how best to move forward in achieving the ends of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

I wish you all a successful and productive Forum.

Thank you.