



**Message from Mr. Pekka Patosaari  
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**International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples:  
Honouring Indigenous Youth, Languages and Sacred Sites  
9 August 2007**

It is an honour to send my congratulations to the World's Indigenous Peoples as we take this moment to recognize the vital importance of protecting and cultivating Indigenous youth, languages and sacred sites.

As discussed at this year's session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, there is an inextricable link between forests and the health and vitality of Indigenous communities. International recognition and protection of sacred sites is a first step toward ensuring that lands critical to Indigenous culture and spirituality are safeguarded. Ensuring that lands critical to Indigenous livelihoods are similarly protected remains a larger and ongoing challenge, one which the UN Forum on Forests continues to seek to address.

The support for and protection of Indigenous Peoples' rights is intrinsic to our global efforts to provide greater sustainability in our social and economic development. Diversity in language and culture signifies diversity in knowledge, and goes hand-in-hand with our common goal of ensuring sustainable forest management, greater biodiversity and ecological health and vitality. Supporting the inter-generational transfer of Indigenous languages is an essential component in sustaining traditional knowledge, forest-related knowledge and culture.

However, perhaps the greatest challenge lies in giving Indigenous youth the tools to balance the demands of an ever-changing world, which often threaten traditional livelihoods. Too often Indigenous communities continue to lag behind others in terms of education and health services. Hope lies in the empowerment of our younger generations, as Indigenous communities make strides toward the attainment of greater self-determination. The need to secure access to and protection of traditional lands, waters and resources, in order to alleviate poverty among Indigenous Peoples, is increasingly recognized by the international community. Ratification of the Declaration of Indigenous Rights will be a milestone in this effort. Empowering our youth to become the drivers of this change will be critical to its long term success.

Let us use this Day to honour the great contributions of Indigenous cultures to our common knowledge, as well as to the protection of our forests and our world, to recognize the strides we continue to make, and to give courage and hope to the generations that follow. We at the UN Forum on Forests Secretariat would like to assure you of our support and readiness to work collaboratively to the common cause of sustainability of natural and cultural resources.