



United Nations Forum on Forests

Global Partnership: For Forests, For People

International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples 9 August 2008

It is an honor to send our congratulations to the Indigenous Peoples around the world, on this occasion of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. Time and again, the close link between the health and vitality of forests and that of the Indigenous communities that live in and near forests have been recognized and highlighted. As forest-dwellers, Indigenous Peoples are key players in sustainable development of these valuable ecosystems, while at the same time the cultural, spiritual, and economic importance of forest resources for Indigenous communities is undeniable.

The UN Forum on Forests has always recognized the strong role of Indigenous Peoples in achieving sustainable forest management. Last year, the Forum adopted the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests (NLBI), the first ever inter-governmental instrument on sustainable forest management. This Instrument, which was subsequently adopted by the General Assembly, includes substantial recognition and concern for the rights and needs of local and Indigenous communities. The NLBI covers issues ranging from protection and use of traditional forest-related knowledge and practices in sustainable forest management, to the need for enhanced access to forest resources and relevant markets to support the livelihoods of forest dependent local and Indigenous communities, living in and outside forest areas.

Passed through generations, in the form of songs, stories, dances, poetry, and art, traditional knowledge on forest management and conservation of forest biodiversity has safeguarded and sustained our natural heritage for centuries. International recognition and protection of sacred sites is an important first step toward ensuring that forest lands intrinsic to Indigenous culture and spirituality are safeguarded. Working toward securing access to lands and resources critical to Indigenous livelihoods, however, remains an ongoing challenge, especially in efforts to alleviate poverty among Indigenous Peoples.

The support for and protection of Indigenous Peoples' rights is essential to our global efforts to provide greater sustainability in our social and economic development. Therefore, implementation of the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests will only be successful if it is undertaken in the true spirit of partnership with Indigenous Peoples at all levels.

Let us use this Day to honor the contributions of Indigenous cultures to the protection of the world's forests. The Secretariat of the UN Forum on Forests assures you of our support and willingness to work collaboratively in ensuring that forests are well-managed and preserved, for generations to come.