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THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

**CLOSING SPEECH TO THE 12th SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON
INDIGENOUS ISSUES**

New York, 31 May 2013

**Distinguished members of the Permanent Forum
Indigenous Elders
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am glad to note and recognize that this Permanent Forum provides an important platform for indigenous peoples to engage with Member States, UN entities and other actors.

It is an opportunity to share experiences and review what is being done – and not least what needs to be done -- to secure fundamental rights and greater opportunities for indigenous peoples.

Over the past two weeks you have heard many statements about exclusion from decision-making processes at local and national levels.

You have heard how indigenous families in remote areas lack basic services such health care, quality education and access to justice.

You have heard how children risk not being registered at birth and being denied identity documents.

This Forum's focus on health, education and culture has highlighted a number of issues which require new approaches for public policies.

In particular, enhanced well-being requires a better understanding of indigenous peoples' backgrounds, living conditions and world views.

All this requires involving indigenous people in decision-making.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the most important challenges is to provide quality education which is culturally appropriate and includes the input of elders and indigenous educators.

Over the past couple of decades we have seen the establishment of indigenous universities in the Arctic and Pacific, in Bolivia, Canada, and Ecuador, in Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru and the United States.

These educational institutions are crucial in providing higher education which incorporates key concepts of indigenous peoples' history, languages and cultures.

Another urgent problem is the alarming deterioration of health among indigenous communities.

In spite of insufficient statistical data on indigenous peoples, we know that more than 50 per cent of indigenous adults over the age of 35 have diabetes.

Indigenous peoples also suffer disproportionately from tuberculosis.

They are more likely to lack access to safe water and sanitation, and less likely to have access to affordable and culturally sensitive health services.

They are more likely to be poor and less likely to have adequate housing.

As a result indigenous peoples tend to die younger.

In some countries the life expectancy gap to other groups is as much as twenty years. This is unacceptable.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now turn to the issue of culture and rights.

Culture and traditional knowledge are inextricably linked to indigenous peoples' identity and relationship to the land they occupy.

Denying culture is a denial of rights, a denial of roots and history.

This session has highlighted the impressive resilience of indigenous communities in Africa fighting for their rights.

There has also been a review of human rights abuses during the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur On The Rights Of Indigenous Peoples.

The Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur On The Human Right To Safe Drinking Water And Sanitation has also underlined the lack of attention to indigenous peoples.

Even in countries where there is nearly universal access to water and sanitation, we know that areas where indigenous peoples are a majority significantly lag behind.

This message, related to the differences within nations, needs to be integrated in the debates on the post-2015 development agenda.

There has been progress, but it is clear we all must do more to ensure universal respect for the rights of indigenous peoples.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The root of much of these problems is indeed inequality.

Discrimination causes and magnifies poverty and ill-health.

We need to work harder to ensure that indigenous peoples are not marginalized.

Indigenous women are among the most marginalized groups in the world.

They face multifaceted discrimination within and from outside their society – including gender-based violence.

Indigenous women play a key cultural role, passing on traditional knowledge, skills and crafts to future generations.

Often they are the custodians of bio-cultural diversity, and of sustainable land and environmental practices.

They also play a critical role as peacemakers, mediators, healers and leaders.

I am pleased to see so many women here today.

We must all recognize indigenous women's role and make sure they are included in decision making at all levels, including in international forums.

This includes discussions on accelerating action towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and defining the post 2015 development agenda.

The current MDG process has devoted little attention to indigenous peoples. You have in this forum made clear your expectations that the sustainable development goals should address the cultural aspects of development.

The message we have heard is that indigenous peoples, of course, want development - but development which takes into account culture and identity and the right to influence their own future.

The SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda represent a unique opportunity for Member States to incorporate the rights, perspectives and needs of indigenous peoples.

In closing, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In January, members of the Permanent Forum and some Member States visited me to discuss the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

The Conference requires strong commitment and support from all of us – Governments, civil society, the private sector, academia and, most important, indigenous communities – not least by contributing to the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations.

I would like to conclude by commending the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, indigenous representatives, representatives of Member States and UN agencies for your strong and steady commitment to the rights of indigenous peoples.

The United Nations is committed to continuing to provide an avenue for indigenous peoples to have a meaningful dialogue with Member States, the UN system, civil society and, of course, with each other.

Sovereign equality among States must be reflected in sovereign equality among human beings in the spirit of the UN Charter.

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