

**CHAIRPERSON OF THE UN PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES**

**ADDRESS TO THE OPENING OF THE FOURTEENTH SESSION OF THE  
PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES**

**New York, 20 April 2015**

Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr Wu Hongbo

Mr. Anatoly D. Viktorov, Head of the Department for Humanitarian cooperation and Human Rights of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation

Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,

Distinguished observers from Member States, Indigenous Peoples' Organizations, the Inter-Governmental system, non-governmental organizations, academia and the media, indigenous sisters and brothers, indigenous youth and indigenous parliamentarians.

It is with my great pleasure that I welcome all of you here today at this fourteenth session of the Permanent Forum.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere gratitude to my colleagues, the Expert Members of the Permanent Forum for their confidence in and support for electing me as the Chairperson for this session of the Permanent Forum. I also acknowledge their remarkable depth of knowledge, skill, commitment and experience and thank them for their unwavering contributions in fulfilling the Permanent Forum's mandate including more effective im-

plementation of its recommendations, especially in light of the fact that all of their work is done on a voluntary basis.

I want to acknowledge the Onondaga Nation, in particular, Tadodaho Sid Hill, the traditional Chief of the Onondaga Nation, the original inhabitants of this land and to thank them for the welcome into their beautiful territory once again.

To begin with I would like to acknowledge the passing of two great friends of the Permanent Forum and champions of the rights of indigenous peoples.

Tonya Gonnella Frichner served as a Permanent Forum Member of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues from 2008 to December 2010 as a capable individual nominated by the North American Indigenous peoples' nations and organizations, was a testament to her unremitting advocacy for indigenous peoples. In this important role, Tonya brought energy, integrity, dedication, zest, humility and compassion.

Augusto Willemsen-Diaz will always represent an example for everyone. Working inside the United Nations, he always found the best way to promote the rights of indigenous peoples. He is truly a pioneer who contributed in a decisive way to the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples, whether at the international, regional, national or local level. He will be remembered for his work, in the 1987 José R. Martínez Cobo Report, "Study of the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations", a seminal work on indigenous peoples in the UN system, to which he was the main contributor.

I would ask you to join me in one minute silence for Ms Tonya Gonnella Frichner, who passed away 14<sup>th</sup> February 2015 and Don Augusto Willemsen-Diaz who passed away 14 December 2014

(One minute silence)

This meeting, the fourteenth session, comes at a critical time for indigenous peoples and the United Nations. Last year the outcome document of the high level plenary meeting known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples was adopted with an action oriented document directed at achieving the ends of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We must be alert to the full gamut of actions included in the Outcome Document and not focus solely on procedure and process. In addition we must continue to emphasise the rights enshrined in the UN Declaration and the legally binding status of the Declaration if we are to realise those rights in a comprehensive and substantive manner. To endorse the UN Declaration publicly and internationally while undermining its character domestically is to engage in "rights ritualism" where lip service is paid to the human rights of indigenous peoples while shielding institutional or structural resistance to their realisation.

In addition the fourteenth session is an opportunity whereby the expert members of the Forum are able to report to participants our ongoing work in reviewing our working methods and conceive of ways to ensure the Forum is more effective in meeting its comprehensive but complex mandate which includes economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and the promotion and protection of the human rights of indigenous

peoples within the UN system. There must be an examination of, and reform in the way the Forum conducts its work in order to be responsive to the needs of indigenous and this involves all aspects of the Permanent Forum, ranging from its annual sessions, the role of the Expert Members and their inter-sessional work, the secretariat, and engagement with indigenous peoples, NGOs, UN agencies, member states and others. This continues the tradition of the forum, which in its 4th session, appointed two members, Mr. Yuri Boychenko and Mr. Parshuram Tamang, to prepare a working paper on practices and methods of work to be submitted at the fifth session of the Permanent Forum.

Let me now turn to some of the work that needs to be considered over the next two weeks.

The fourteenth session is the Permanent Forum's review year. This afternoon, we will be moving to Conference Room 4, where we will begin our discussion on the Outcome of the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. The session on the World Conference will include an overview of the System Wide Action Plan to ensure a coherent approach to achieving the ends of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as outlined in Paragraph 31 of the Outcome Document of the World Conference.

On Tuesday morning there will be a discussion on Youth, self-harm and suicide, an extremely important issue in our communities. On Tuesday afternoon there will be a panel discussion on Indigenous Peoples in the Pacific region.

On Wednesday morning there will be a discussion on the Permanent Forum's Future Work. On Thursday there is a discussion with UN Agencies where focus will be on the Post-2015 Development Agenda and Food, hunger and disease. The Chair of the Inter-Agency Support

Group will also give a brief overview of the annual meeting of the IASG, held in 2014. On Friday, there will be a discussion on the exploration on the drafting of an Indigenous Development Index. Like the Human Development Index, a set of indicators that embraces the distinct legal and political status and rights of indigenous peoples as well as their unique economic, social and cultural context. Though a number of UN agencies have or are presently developing indicators for their respective work, there is a need for a universal set of indicators guided by the UN Declaration.

Now we turn to the second week, where the agenda item for Monday 27<sup>th</sup> April focuses on human rights with a focus on the Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. There will be statements by EMRIP, the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples and Mr. Rodrigo Uprimny Yepes (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). There will also be an important dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples.

On Tuesday, the expert group meeting on the theme “Dialogue on an optional protocol to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” will take place. Immediately after the discussion there will be presentations by Permanent Forum members on Beijing +20. On Wednesday, three studies that have been authored by Permanent Forum members will be presented. On Thursday we discuss other important issues under Future Work.

We have a very full agenda of activities, including many side events which will take place during lunch time and evenings. Tomorrow night (Tuesday) there is the opening of the Exhibition titled “Indigenous Housing and Sustainable Settlements” where a cultural event and

reception will take place. I hope you will support the performances of our brothers and sisters.

These are just some of the highlights to be covered during this fourteenth session.

In concluding let me urge participants to consider carefully the concept paper on working methods reform. The Permanent Forum welcomes and appreciates any response, comments and feedback and concrete ideas for reform from indigenous peoples, states and agencies. In particular What practical steps and actions can be taken to improve the annual sessions of the Permanent Forum; What can be done to ensure equitable speaking time for statements at the annual sessions and; given the overwhelming number of recommendations that the Permanent Forum hears each year at its session, what are some of the procedural and substantive matters that should be instituted to improve implementation of the recommendations to address this situation

As Permanent Forum experts we note that reforming the annual session in order to achieve the mandate of the Forum requires behavioural change on behalf of participants including indigenous peoples, states and agencies.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to indigenous peoples of the world who continue the struggle for their rights, sometimes sacrificing their own lives in the process. I call on all of us to work together to make meaningful and worthwhile changes for the survival, dignity and well-being of all indigenous peoples.

Thank You.