

Foreword to the State of the World's Indigenous Peoples

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Indigenous peoples are custodians of some of the most biologically diverse territories in the world. They are also responsible for a great deal of the world's linguistic and cultural diversity, and their traditional knowledge has been and continues to be an invaluable resource that benefits all of mankind.

Yet, indigenous peoples continue to suffer discrimination, marginalization, extreme poverty and conflict. Some are being dispossessed of their traditional lands as their livelihoods are being undermined. Meanwhile, their belief systems, cultures, languages and ways of life continue to be threatened, sometimes even by extinction.

Increasingly, governments are recognizing these threats, and matching such recognition with action. From land claims settlements and constitutional amendments to important symbolic actions such as apologies for past treatment of indigenous peoples, governments around the world are making important steps towards addressing indigenous peoples' concerns.

In responding to the challenges they continue to face, indigenous peoples have engaged the international community, calling for a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and a permanent forum at the United Nations that meets regularly to discuss indigenous peoples' issues and make recommendations to the UN system and beyond.

The United Nations has committed its unwavering support to a future where all indigenous peoples will enjoy peace, human rights and well-being, and has responded to indigenous peoples' demands, welcoming them as partners. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted in September 2007, and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues meets annually at UN Headquarters, bringing together indigenous peoples, Member States, NGOs, UN agencies and other intergovernmental organizations.

Much work remains to be done in advancing the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. One condition for facilitating the implementation of the Declaration is information about the state of the world's indigenous peoples. The Permanent Forum recognized this in its first session when it recommended that the United Nations system produce a publication "on the state of the world's indigenous peoples, containing data on indigenous peoples and discussing issues relating to indigenous peoples in the thematic areas within the Forum's mandate."¹

Responding to this request, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs reached out to experts on indigenous issues who have contributed the material for this publication. The chapters are based on the thematic areas within the Permanent Forum's mandate, and highlight some major issues indigenous peoples face.

In a world confronted by multiple crises, indigenous peoples remain committed to their struggles, and their cultures continue to be vibrant while their traditional knowledge is an invaluable source of ingenuity. This publication will be a useful tool for strengthening partnerships and cooperation with indigenous peoples.

¹ Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Report on the first session (12-24 May 2002) E/2002/43/Rev.1 Para 8.