



Fifth anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

*Statement by Chief Edward John,
Chairperson of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues*

Five years ago on this important day, 13 September, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly after more than two decades of intense struggles.

From the moment the UN Declaration was adopted, it became a unique international instrument that set standards and the foundation for the continued survival of indigenous peoples, the protection of their rights, dignity and well-being. The UN Declaration is an international human rights instrument that, today, enjoys universal consensus. It is the same instrument that underpins the activities of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Today we also need to extend our deep gratitude to the many committed representatives of indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations, Governments and the United Nations whose passion and dedication lead to the adoption of the UN Declaration.

With the adoption of the UN Declaration five years ago, the Permanent Forum has new and extensive responsibilities to promote the incorporation of the UN Declaration into national law and policy, including national courts and administrative decisions. Second, it calls upon the Forum to follow up on the “effectiveness” of the Declaration – that is to examine and assess the realities on the ground, to see how the Declaration is implemented at the local and national levels and what gaps in implementation persist.

Even as indigenous peoples commemorate this historic moment, there is still a lot of work to be done. We cannot ignore the challenges and gaps in implementation of the UN Declaration, and I call on Governments, UN agencies and indigenous peoples to reaffirm the spirit, principles and rights enshrined in the UN Declaration and to renew our commitment to its full implementation.