

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**MR. WU HONGBO
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
AND
COORDINATOR OF THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL DECADE
OF THE WORLD'S INDIGNEOUS PEOPLE**

**DELIVERED BY
MS. SHAMSHAD AKHTAR
ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**STATEMENT TO THE THIRD COMMITTEE
AGENDA ITEM "INDIGENOUS ISSUES"**

New York, 22 October 2012

Mr. Chairman,
Professor James Anaya, Special Rapporteur
on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Coordinator of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, I am pleased to address this Committee today.

It was just two months ago that the United Nations celebrated the annual International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, under the theme "Indigenous Media, Empowering Indigenous Voices". An interactive dialogue was held between indigenous journalists, radio producers and broadcasters from around the world. It highlighted the way indigenous peoples' own media systems support expressions of identity, cultural diversity and heritage.

Distinguished delegates,

Discussions are underway regarding the post-2015 development agenda. Somewhat timely, is the fact that the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples, will come to an end in 2014.

The report of the Secretary-General that assesses the progress made during the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People contained in document A/67/273, also mentions the intention of contributing to ongoing efforts to define a post-2015 development agenda.

On progress made so far, allow me to share with you a few highlights.

One of the biggest was the voting in the General Assembly on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The UN Declaration has guided constitutional and legislative reform in a number of countries throughout the world. And, it has served as a reference in several rulings by national tribunals, regional courts and human rights systems.

The Declaration has been increasingly used as a reference by the United Nations Treaty bodies and other monitoring mechanisms, such as the universal periodic review.

Indigenous peoples' own holistic concepts of development with culture and identity, well-being and interculturality, have also been incorporated in development policies and programmes at the national level.

Within the United Nations system, projects specifically addressing indigenous peoples have been initiated. In a few cases, UN agencies have included respect of indigenous peoples' cultural diversity through consultative processes with indigenous peoples. While indeed welcomed, efforts to mainstream indigenous peoples' issues in the development agenda at country level, should also be continued and strengthened.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to Member States and UN agencies that have generously contributed in the past year to the Trust Fund on Indigenous Issues. The activities supported by the Trust Fund are vital for implementing the mandate of the Permanent Forum, and the goal and objectives of the Second Decade.

Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite progress achieved, we still have a long way to go in fully realizing the rights of indigenous peoples.

Challenges persist, especially in recognizing indigenous peoples' right to ownership, and use of their lands, territories and natural resources.

It has become even more imperative that indigenous peoples are consulted about projects affecting their own communities. The principle of free, prior and informed consent must be fully operationalized and applied. Corporations and extractive industries interested in exploiting resources located in indigenous territories, must abide by the principles and norms of corporate social responsibility.

The report of the Secretary-General indicates that many Member States, United Nations agencies and intergovernmental organizations have reported important initiatives for indigenous peoples that are aligned with the goals and objectives of the Second Decade. Still, indigenous peoples remain mostly invisible in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

The United Nations Millennium Declaration lacks a specific reference to indigenous peoples. We must keep indigenous peoples in mind when considering the post-2015 development agenda.

In order to meet our targets for post-2015, governmental initiatives could consider many areas of their work, such as improving the collection and disaggregation of data regarding indigenous peoples. Public policies, laws, programmes and projects must be designed in consultation with indigenous peoples.

Indigenous peoples need their voices to be heard. They need the proper space to effectively participate and contribute to public policy and debates on issues affecting them. They want to be agents of their own change. We should grant them this opportunity.

Excellencies,

An opportunity for a real and effective engagement between Governments, the UN system and indigenous peoples is close at hand.

The United Nations General Assembly adopted, last September, a resolution on the organization of a high-level plenary meeting in 2014, to be known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

Let me echo the words of Grand Ed John, the Chair of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues: “The Conference represents a unique opportunity to ensure greater and more inclusive participation of indigenous peoples in decisions which affect them. Indigenous peoples need to be involved, heard and their issues addressed for real and transformative changes to happen”.

In my capacity as Coordinator of the Second Decade, I want to ensure that the World Conference contributes to making a difference to the lives of indigenous peoples. This can be done through concrete actions by Governments and by the UN system at large, in genuine partnership with indigenous peoples.

On 13 September this year, we celebrated the fifth anniversary of the historical adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Let us all be guided by the principles and rights enshrined in the UN Declaration. Let us make this Declaration a living document where the world’s indigenous peoples, through their rights to self-determination, can freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

Thank you.
