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**MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE WORLD'S
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

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It is a great joy for all of us to celebrate this special day with the indigenous peoples around the world who number more than 370 million. The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples was first celebrated in 1994 at the beginning of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People declared by the United Nations General Assembly. Since then, this celebration has become a solid tradition among many indigenous peoples, nations, organizations and movements worldwide. This year, we are especially glad that the 9th of August has been chosen by the Haudenosaunee people – the indigenous peoples of this land - for concluding an epic campaign to honour their first treaty – the Two Row Wampum - concluded with the Dutch immigrants in 1613. A delegation including their non-indigenous neighbours are with us today after having collectively travelled thousands of miles on the Hudson River, and we pay tribute to their efforts and presence among us.

The Two Row Wampum Renewal Campaign inspired this year's special theme, which is "*Indigenous peoples building alliances: Honouring treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements*".

In the world today, there are many treaties, agreements and constructive arrangements between the States and indigenous peoples, which were signed with former

colonial powers or their successors, and they remain central to the discussions on indigenous peoples' rights. I would like to mention some of them.

In New Zealand, the Treaty of Waitangi was signed between the British and the Maori in 1840. The Treaty has recently emerged as a central unifying force, providing a cultural frame of reference for the renewal of Maori-State relations along the lines of partnership and power-sharing.

In Canada, the Inuit people are celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, signed in 1993 in a spirit of partnership between them and the Canadian Government.

The Sámi Parliaments established in Sweden, Norway and Finland represent examples of alliances between the Sámi peoples and the countries they live in. Such institutions are elected with a view to protect the interests of the Sámi people.

In 2000, in Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and non-indigenous peoples walked together, side by side, in a symbolic march across the Sydney Harbour Bridge. That event, which inspired joint efforts for the improvement of indigenous peoples' education and health, showed that local movements of indigenous and non-indigenous peoples have a powerful effect at mobilizing public opinion and holding Governments accountable.

I could cite many more examples. But let me now reflect on a question that is central for many indigenous peoples throughout the world, and especially for the African region. Can partnerships between indigenous peoples and states be strengthened if there is no recognition of indigenous peoples and their communities? Can genuine alliances be built if the historic injustices of the past are not addressed in order to truly begin building a post colonial nation comprising of different groups and peoples?

In South Africa, after the advent of democracy in 1994, the Khomani San were among the first communities to benefit from an agreement for the restitution of land in the Mier Reserve, which constituted recognition and redress for centuries of marginalization. It is also worth mentioning the several cases of legislative recognition of indigenous peoples in Africa, such as Law No. 5-2011 on the promotion and protection of

the rights of indigenous populations in the Republic of Congo, and the ratification of ILO Convention No. 169 by the Central African Republic. At constitutional level, many progresses have also been made: the constitution of Cameroon mentions indigenous peoples, while Burundi and Rwanda provides for special representation of the indigenous Batwa people in the National Assembly and the Senate.

However, the rights of indigenous peoples in the African continent are a long way from being recognized, protected and promoted. The concept of indigeneity has not been fully recognised despite the conceptualisation provided by the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR). Nevertheless, reconciliation processes and truth-seeking mechanisms, such as the Kenyan Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, have a potential to strengthen indigenous peoples' rights and identity. First, because the transitional process can address historical discrimination and injustices. Second, because the recognition of indigenous peoples' identities, both collective and individual, could further strengthen indigenous peoples' rights around community ties and self-identification through a common past.

“Travelling down the river of life together”. This is the lesson that I have personally learned today, when I met the brothers and sisters of the Haudenosaunee people just a few hours ago, after they paddled for miles along the Hudson River.

Honouring treaties is not just about the past. It is about the present and the future. It is about revisiting and living up to past engagements in order to renew and strengthen our present and future relationships, both as peoples and nations.

The right of indigenous peoples to recognition and enforcement of treaties, agreements and other constrictive arrangements is a key right recognized in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples. The UN Declaration preamble further recognizes that these rights are ‘the basis for a strengthened partnership between indigenous peoples and States.’

The UN Declaration underlines that “the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples [...] will enhance harmonious and cooperative relations between the State and indigenous peoples, based on principles of justice, democracy, respect for human rights, non-discrimination and good faith”. Additionally, in Article 37, the UN Declaration affirms indigenous peoples’ right to the recognition, observance and enforcement of treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements concluded with States and their successors, for harmonious and cooperative relations to be secured.

Honouring treaties, agreements and other arrangements allow for conflicting notions of territoriality, cultural practice and ideas of development to be reconciled for the greater common good.

For unity among peoples and nations to be a reality, there is an urgent need to address the persistent and deep-rooted problems related to historical wrongs, failed policies of the past, and continuing barriers to the full realization of indigenous peoples’ rights.” Only if we learn about each other, understand each other, renew a shared history that often times is forgotten, we will also be able to establish genuine synergies and alliances. It is a commitment to live in peace by weaving constructive relationships every day.

The International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples continues to offer us an opportunity to reflect upon experiences that enhance intercultural dialogue for the pursuance of peace. Initiatives of interchange and dialogue between us, indigenous peoples, and our non-indigenous neighbours at the local level can have a powerful domino effect over other levels of interaction. For example, they can prompt mutual respect and understanding at national level, in view of overcoming stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes. They can also help to base partnerships on mutual recognition, good faith, respect and consent between States and indigenous peoples at regional and international level.

Honouring treaties and agreements represents a realization of indigenous peoples' right to self-determination. The UN Declaration affirms the fundamental importance of the right to self-determination of all peoples, by virtue of which they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has been placing priority on the concept of development with culture and identity, as well as on the notion of *buen vivir* (living-well), emerged in the Andean countries of South America. This way, different cultures interact for the promotion of an alternative development in which the objectives of economic growth make way for considerations of wellbeing in the social context of a community and in a unique environmental situation. Therefore, maintaining and honouring our spiritual, cultural and historic relationship with nature, land and natural resources will protect Mother Earth for future generations.

We must also recognize that it is the solidarity and support of non-indigenous peoples that help us in our tireless struggles in the realization of our rights. Honouring treaties and other long-standing agreements can go far in helping to build trust among indigenous peoples to rebuilding relationships in a true spirit of good faith, partnership, and mutual respect.

In closing, I would like to express a wish. Next year, in September 2014, the United Nations will celebrate the first World Conference on the World's Indigenous Peoples. May that represent the opportunity for States to reaffirm their commitment to honour and fulfil their obligations under the Treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements that have been concluded with indigenous peoples. And for us all, may that be the occasion to renew and strengthen our alliances, using the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a framework and tool for respectful and constructive relations.