
UN rights chief Navi Pillay urges States to do more to respect treaties with indigenous peoples

GENEVA (07 August 2013) –States need to do more to honour and strengthen the treaties they have with indigenous peoples, no matter how long ago they were signed, UN human rights chief Navi Pillay has said in a statement to mark International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples on 9 August.

“Even when signed or otherwise agreed more than a century ago, many treaties remain the cornerstone for the protection of the identity, land and customs of indigenous peoples, determining the relationship they have with the State. They are thus of major significance to human rights today,” she said.

Treaties often marked a decisive step in ending a period of conflict, exploitation and expropriation, the High Commissioner noted.

“The honouring of treaties has in many cases been described as a sacred undertaking requiring good faith by each party for their proper enforcement. Yet too often indigenous communities are obliged to go to the courts to force States to live up to their promises,” she added.

“The nature of the agreements themselves, with their spirit and contents passed on through elders to future generations, reminds us of their fundamental importance,” Pillay said.

“The fact that exploitation and expropriation continue today underscores the need to do more to protect the rights of the estimated 370 million indigenous people worldwide,” the High Commissioner said.

Pillay pointed to the importance of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted in 2007, in promoting the recognition, observance and enforcement of treaties and other arrangements concluded with States or their successors.

“There is a growing commitment by States to fully implement indigenous peoples’ rights, as shown by constitutional, legislative or administrative measures that recognize indigenous identity, rights to lands and resources, culturally appropriate forms of development, as well as programmes to tackle poverty and disadvantage,” the High

Commissioner said.

“The message of this International Day of Indigenous Peoples is about building alliances and honouring treaties. This reminds us that efforts need to be redoubled to build a partnership between States and indigenous peoples based on trust, mutual respect, rule of law and the affirmation of indigenous peoples’ culture and customs,” said Pillay.

“As we look forward to the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in September 2014, I encourage States to take concrete steps to honour and strengthen the treaties they have concluded with indigenous peoples and to cooperate with them in implementing new agreements or other constructive arrangements through transparent, inclusive and participatory negotiations,” the High Commissioner said.

ENDS

For further information and media requests, please contact Liz Throssell (+ 41 22 917 9434 / + 41 79 752 0488 / ethrossell@ohchr.org) or Cecile Pouilly (+41 9179310/ cpouilly@ohchr.org)

UN Human Rights, follow us on social media:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/unitednationshumanrights>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/UNrightswire>

Google+ [gplus.to/unitednationshumanrights](https://plus.google.com/unitednationshumanrights)

YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/UNOHCHR>

Storify: <http://storify.com/UNrightswire>

Check the Universal Human Rights Index: <http://uhri.ohchr.org/en>
