

Brussels, 8 August 2007

Message of European Commissioner for External Relations and Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, on the occasion of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples

"Tomorrow we will mark the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. This is an important moment to celebrate the enormous diversity and cultural wealth of indigenous peoples in all parts of the world.

For populations whose relationship to the earth and natural elements is such an integral part of their identity, climate change poses a particular threat. Rising sea levels, disappearing glaciers, and the desertification of once resource rich and fertile areas threaten their very survival as individuals and peoples. The European Union is in the forefront of international efforts to tackle the challenge of adaptation through more responsible energy use, through improving education and awareness, and through promoting global commitments to halt climate change.

As we pursue this course we will ensure that we honour our commitments to protect natural ecosystems such as rainforests, and the traditional population of these habitats, in particular their food security and traditions.

In 2003, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues published a number of recommendations which identified the primary areas of concern in the position of indigenous peoples in today's world. A key demand of the Permanent Forum was the rapid adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I hope the remaining obstacles to this process will soon be removed so that we can celebrate its adoption by the UN General Assembly in the near future.

On behalf of the European Commission I re-state our unwavering commitment to support indigenous peoples all over the world."

For more information:

Promoting and Protecting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/ip/index.htm