



**INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, INDIGENOUS VOICES**

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **UN system and NGOs call for an early adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the General Assembly**

*Chairperson of UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and Special Rapporteur appeal to Members States*

New York, 17 October – Indigenous peoples' representatives from all over the world are attending events this week at UN Headquarters to celebrate the recent adoption by the Human Rights Council of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This landmark document was endorsed by the Council in June after more than twenty years of discussions and a fruitful dialogue among States and indigenous peoples. The events in New York this week coincided with the Third Committee of the General Assembly's discussions on indigenous issues on 16 and 17 October.

Co-sponsored by the Secretariat of UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues/DSPD/DESA, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, NGOs and the Permanent Missions of Mexico and Peru to the United Nations, the events highlight the significance and importance of the Declaration.


Speaking about the document, UN Under-Secretary-General José Antonio Ocampo said, "I welcome the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the first historic session of the Human Rights Council in June and I am looking forward to the final endorsement of the Declaration by the General Assembly in fall. The Declaration provides the international community with a comprehensive international standard which we should all strive together to achieve."

The Declaration addresses both individual and collective rights, cultural rights and identity rights to education, health, employment, language and others. It outlaws discrimination against indigenous peoples and promotes their full participation in all matters that concern them. It also ensures their right to remain distinct and to pursue their own visions of economic and social and cultural development.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of Indigenous People, Mr. Rodolfo Stavenhagen and the Chairperson of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz have sent a strong



United Nations



message to members of the UN General Assembly to adopt the Declaration without further delay in the present session through a formal letter of appeal addressed to the Member States.

Speaking at a special event on 16 October, a panel discussion titled, “Towards implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”, Ms. Tauli- Corpuz highlighted that many of the rights in the Declaration require new approaches to global issues, such as development, decentralization and multicultural democracy. Mr. Stavenhagen stressed the need to urgently get the Declaration adopted in the current session of the General Assembly and to work towards its full implementation, including making it a part of everyday life, across the world.

Other events included the book launch of “Mairin Iwanka Raya, Indigenous Women Stand against Violence” prepared by the International Indigenous Women’s Forum. The book focuses on human rights violations and the violence faced by indigenous women. It is a companion piece to the UN Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against Women presented on 9 October.

Like other UN Declarations, even though it is not legally binding, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is expected to have a major impact on the rights of indigenous peoples worldwide. Once adopted, it will establish an important standard for the treatment of indigenous peoples and will undoubtedly be a significant tool towards eliminating human rights violations against the estimated 370 million indigenous people worldwide and assist them in combating discrimination and marginalization.

The Human Rights Council adopted the Declaration on 29 June 2006 by a vote of 30 in favour, 2 against and 12 abstentions. The document needs to be now approved by the members of the UN General Assembly. It is expected that the Declaration will be submitted for adoption by the General Assembly at its current 61<sup>st</sup> Session.

“The exceptional process through which Member States and indigenous peoples worked together on each article, painfully yet collaboratively, has come to an end. A vote for the Declaration is a vote in favour of this collaborative process and in the greatness of the UN. It would be a vote to open the doors to indigenous peoples once and for all”, said Mr. Aqqaluk Lynge, Vice-Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council at a press conference to launch this week’s events.

For more information of the Declaration, please visit:

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/declaration.html>

**For background information on the Declaration or interviews** with UN officials and indigenous leaders, please contact:

Oisika Chakrabarti, Department of Public Information, tel: 212.963.6816,

e-mail: [mediainfo@un.org](mailto:mediainfo@un.org)

**For Secretariat of the Permanent Forum**, please contact:

Mirian Masaquiza, Secretariat of UNPFII, tel: 917.367.6006,

e-mail: [IndigenousPermanentForum@un.org](mailto:IndigenousPermanentForum@un.org)

