



HOLY SEE

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**Statement by H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore
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Before the Third Committee, on item 66:

Indigenous Issues

New York, 19 October 2009

Mr Chairman,

At the outset, my delegation would like to express its congratulations on the commitment and competence with which you, Mr. Chairman, have been directing the debate on this important item.

For the Holy See, speaking on this agenda item is more than an intellectual exercise, for it comes from its long-standing commitment to addressing the social, personal and spiritual needs of the world's more than 370 million indigenous people. Since the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (DRIP) by the General Assembly in September 2007, the rights of indigenous peoples have drawn special international attention and my delegation believes that the celebration of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples will help foster greater interest in and respect for these communities.

To revitalize the activities of the Decade, my delegation believes that pertinent initiatives should be guided by principles of respect for the identity and culture of indigenous populations. Understanding and respecting their cultural traditions, religious consciousness and their long-standing ability to decide and control their development programs foster better interaction and cooperation between peoples and governments.

It has been noted by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples that human rights violations continue and that the DRIP is not being fully implemented. My delegation would like to recall the conviction so often resounding in this hall that the recognition of the fundamental dignity of every person and promotion of human rights remain the most effective strategy for their comprehensive development. We have to work harder to make indigenous peoples aware of their own human dignity and empower their communities to shape their life according to their own traditions.

In times of change and economic crises, the challenges facing indigenous peoples should not be forgotten. In the process of downsizing social security systems, due consideration should be given to them with models of authentic development which avoid destruction of land, water and other forms of environmental exploitation in the name of short-term economic advantage. In this regard, my delegation urges corporations to conduct their enterprise in a way which does not harm the rights of indigenous peoples and promotes responsible use of the environment.

In the midst of social and economic change, traditional networks of solidarity have more to do; promotion of indigenous initiatives to defend their rights must therefore be honoured. The concept of mobility of labour has given rise to increased migration, which leads to situations of human decline, and creates new forms of psychological instability and enormous cultural degradation. Interaction between cultures has a positive value, but it should be effected through intercultural dialogue not by domination or subjugation.

In the Second Decade, for the sake of social welfare, the problem of food insecurity needs to be addressed within a long-term perspective, eliminating the structural causes that give rise to it and promoting the agricultural development of poorer countries. Agricultural reform requires of indigenous populations greater investment in rural infrastructures, irrigation systems, transportation and organization of markets as well as greater access to agricultural technology. The 2009 International Day of the World's Indigenous People focused on HIV/AIDS related issues. In the Second Decade, the vulnerability of indigenous peoples, especially children and women, to this epidemic must draw special attention and appropriate health education is essential to preventing its transmission. All these issues are to be accomplished with the involvement of local communities and respecting moral values based on human nature.

It is also necessary to cultivate a public conscience that recognizes food and access to water as universal rights of all human beings, without distinction or discrimination. The right to food, like the right to water, has an important place within the pursuit of other rights, beginning with the fundamental right to life.

Indigenous communities are deeply rooted in cultures, traditions and practices of respect for Earth, creation and human life. Openness to life has long been at the centre of the indigenous people's spirituality and if personal and social sensitivity towards the acceptance of new life is lost, then other forms of acceptance that are valuable for society also wither away.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.