

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

## THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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### MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE 9 August 2003

Today we celebrate the existence, diversity and achievements of the world's indigenous peoples. We honour their struggles to preserve their cultures, protect their lands and combat discrimination. We pay tribute to those who, without relinquishing their identity, move comfortably between the traditions of their ancestors and the wider, rapidly-changing modern world. And we remind ourselves that indigenous peoples still face threats to their lives and destruction of their belief systems, cultures, languages and ways of life.

It was on this day in 1982 that the Working Group on Indigenous Populations first met. Much that has happened since then has raised the profile of indigenous issues on the international agenda. The International Year of the World's Indigenous People was observed in 1993, and the International Decade started in 1995. The Commission on Human Rights has been working on a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, and has appointed a Special Rapporteur to examine indigenous issues. Most recently, the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has given indigenous peoples a home at the United Nations. As a mechanism for partnership between indigenous peoples, the Member States and the United Nations system, the Permanent Forum gives hope that the motto of the Decade – “partnership in action” – is being turned into reality in the areas of economic and social development, environment, health, education, culture and human rights.

The human family is a tapestry of enormous beauty and diversity. The indigenous peoples of the world are a rich and integral part of that tapestry. They have much to be proud of and much to teach the other members of the human family. The protection and promotion of their rights and cultures is of fundamental importance to all States and all peoples.