



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES INDIGENOUS VOICES

## PRESS RELEASE

### Reconciliation between States and Indigenous Peoples highlighted on International Day

(New York, 6 August) – In commemoration of the International Day of the World’s Indigenous People (9 August), an observance at UN Headquarters on **Friday, 8 August** will focus on efforts by indigenous peoples and States to foster reconciliation.

A panel discussion, titled “*Conciliation and Reconciliation between States and Indigenous Peoples,*” will include speakers Gert Rosenthal, Permanent Representative of Guatemala to the United Nations; Henri Paul Normandin, Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations; and Chief Oren Lyons, spiritual leader, Onandaga Nation (*see full programme below*).

Reconciliation between indigenous peoples and States can take many forms that differ from country to country. Generally it involves recognition for past injustices, justice for victims and the healing of relationships. The adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, after more than 20 years of negotiations among States and indigenous peoples with the mediation of the United Nations, is itself an historic act of reconciliation.

In a message to mark the Day, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon highlighted the Declaration, saying: “The result of more than two decades of negotiations, [the Declaration] provides a momentous opportunity for states and indigenous peoples to strengthen their relationships, promote reconciliation, and ensure that the past is not repeated.”

Mr. Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs and Coordinator of the Second International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People, further emphasized that “the Declaration is a manifestation of reconciliation between indigenous peoples and states – and a mechanism for carrying that reconciliation forward. Indeed, 2008 has already witnessed concrete measures towards reconciliation in several countries.”

Some recent examples of reconciliation efforts include:

- In February 2008, the Australian Government formally apologized to members of the “Stolen Generations” and their families, for the policy of forcible removal of indigenous children, which affected generations of indigenous Australians.
- In June 2008, Prime Minister Harper of Canada offered an apology to the approximately 80,000 former students of Indian residential schools still living, to their family members and their communities, for the forcible removal of children from their homes.
- In June 2008, the Government of Japan formally recognized the Ainu people as indigenous people of Northern Japan. The resolution adopted by the Parliament states that the Ainu have a distinct language, religion and culture, recognizing that Japan is not an ethnically homogenous nation.



United Nations