

MS. MARIAM WALLET ABOUBAKRINE

CHAIRPERSON

**ADDRESS TO THE OPENING OF THE SIXTEENTH SESSION OF THE
PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES**

New York, 24 April 2017

H.E. Durga Prasad Bhattarai, Vice-President of the 71th Session of the General Assembly;

H. E. Ambassador Cristián Barros Melet, Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council;

Mr. Lenni Montiel, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs;

Honorable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs of Canada;

Ms. Lakshmi Puri, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women;

Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,

Distinguished Representatives of Member States, Indigenous Peoples, United Nations agencies, programmes and funds, non-governmental organizations, academia and others,

Respected Indigenous Elders

It is with great pleasure to welcome all of you here today at this sixteenth session of the Permanent Forum. A special welcome to all my sisters and brothers from around the world. Many of us have traveled long distances physically but also in the struggle to achieve our rights.

Let me first pay my respects to the Onondaga Nation and Peoples, in particular Todaya Sid Hill, the traditional Chief of the Onondaga Nation, the original inhabitants of this land and to thank them for having us here again.

As we begin a new term, my fellow members of the Permanent Forum and myself are committed to doing our best to fulfil our mandate. We are mindful of the expectations and also of the responsibility placed on us to raise awareness and integrate indigenous issues within the work of the United Nations. I would like to thank my fellow members of the Permanent Forum for their trust by electing me as the Chairperson for the 16th session of the Forum.

This year the pre-session meeting for the expert members of the Forum was held in Canada. I would like to extend our thanks to the Government of Canada for graciously hosting our pre-session meeting, which took place 27 February to 3 March in Ottawa, Canada. The pre-session meeting allowed us to plan for this session and meet with indigenous peoples' organizations, representatives of the Government of Canada, including Ms. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs and members of Parliament.

Excellencies and Friends,

Let me turn to the work that awaits us over the next two weeks and some of the highlights for this session.

The special theme of the session is: *"The Tenth Anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples"*. On the day of the adoption of the Declara-

tion - 13th September 2007 - there was a major change in the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples. Finally, after over twenty some years, a declaration that articulated the vision and the aspirations of indigenous peoples, was finally agreed and adopted by the UN General Assembly.

After ten years, there is some modest progress in its implementation. The Declaration has been used in domestic and regional courts, and the participation of indigenous peoples in political processes, both at the national and international levels has increased.

Fresh attention was drawn to the urgent need to implement the UN Declaration by the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. As a result, the United Nations system is increasingly engaged in indigenous issues, including through the System-wide Action Plan on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the review of the mandate of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the current consultations to enhance the participation of indigenous peoples at the United Nations.

Nevertheless, there is still a need for Member States to include diversity, democracy, and equal opportunities for all their inhabitants regardless of their cultural identities. Furthermore, in many countries, there continues to be a gap between the formal recognition of indigenous peoples and the implementation of policies on the ground. We will hear of the gains and achievements, as well as the challenges that remain, during our deliberations on this theme.

Also on this theme will be a *High-Level Event to mark the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* convened by the President of the 71st session of the General Assembly tomorrow.

This year, the Forum will consider *the empowerment of indigenous women and indigenous youth* as this is an area that continues to merit attention. We are very pleased that the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women included the empowerment of indigenous women as a focus area/emerging issue. We believe that this is an area where there is convergence of the work of the Commission and our Forum, and look forward to continuing our cooperation.

Today, indigenous women participate in the Permanent Forum in great numbers. The rights of indigenous women should be protected at all times and by all of the provisions of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We will also have a discussion to *follow-up on the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples* to give us an overview of recent developments at the national and international level including on national action plans.

In this respect, let me highlight that the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples process is another example of how the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has been embodied considering that States and indigenous peoples determined the most important elements of focus to make the Declaration a reality on the ground in consultation and cooperation with indigenous peoples.

This year, we will continue with the interactive dialogues with Member States, Indigenous Peoples and *the United Nations System*. The basis for these dialogues will be the questionnaire sent by the Secretariat in November 2016 on any action taken or planned in response to the Permanent Forum's recommendations and other relevant issues.

It is our hope that these dialogues will provide an opportunity to identify challenges and opportunities that you may face, as well as the progress in carrying out your commitment to strengthen indigenous peoples' rights. We look forward to this constructive dialogue so we can mutually support our work to promote respect for and full application of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The odds we face in getting our rights respected and our self-determined development operationalized are many. Thus the approach is to strengthen partnerships so that we can consolidate and expand on our gains..

This year, the focus of the discussion under the human rights agenda item will be on indigenous human rights defenders.

The global agenda is framed within the context of the sustainable development goals. As an advisory body of the Economic and Social Council, the Permanent Forum has an important role in the follow up and review of the 2030 Development Agenda. We will continue our deliberations on our contributions to inform this process, with participation of relevant bodies.

The Permanent Forum urges Member States to give due consideration to the rights of indigenous peoples in fulfilling the commitments of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in particular through the elaboration of national programmes. By protecting and pro-

moting the rights of indigenous peoples, as reflected in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Member States will be able to overcome the challenges faced by indigenous peoples and thereby ensure that they are not left behind.

I also would like to draw your attention that during the Forum session, the President of the 61st session of the General Assembly with his advisors will conduct *consultations on the participation of indigenous peoples' representatives and institutions in relevant United Nations meetings on issues affecting them* scheduled for Wednesday 26 April afternoon and Wednesday, 3 May morning.

I am also pleased to announce that for the first time, there will be an *Indigenous Media Zone* organized in coordination with Department of Public Information and indigenous media groups. The Indigenous Media Zone aims at providing a space for indigenous and mainstream media channels and platforms to cover the 16th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

In closing, I would like to reiterate my gratitude to my co-members of the Permanent Forum for taking on their important role which will include engaging with various processes at the national, regional and international level to facilitate the implementation of the Permanent Forum's recommendations to achieve the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

I also extend our sincere thanks to the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum staff who work tirelessly to prepare for the session.

I would like to pay tribute to indigenous peoples of the world who continue the struggle for their rights, sometimes sacrificing their own lives in the process.

Finally, I call upon all of you – representatives of Member States, Indigenous Peoples and the United Nation System - to work together to make meaningful and worthwhile changes for the survival, dignity and well-being of all indigenous peoples. The promotion and implementation of the rights of indigenous peoples benefits us all.

Thank you.