

Remarks by H.E. Mr. Peter Thomson

**President of the 71st Session of the General Assembly, at Opening of the 16th
Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

24 April 2017 11:00AM

I have the honour to deliver the following statement on behalf of the President of the United Nations General Assembly, Peter Thomson, who unfortunately cannot be here today.

Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Elders,

Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to address the 16th Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

This year's Permanent Forum takes place at a halcyon time, as we mark the 10th anniversary of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

While tomorrow we will celebrate this achievement with a High-Level General Assembly event, this occasion also provides an important opportunity for us throughout the Session to reflect on our progress in turning the commitments under the Declaration into meaningful action that promotes the realisation of the rights of indigenous peoples across our world.

Indeed, since the historic adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 10 years ago, here at the United Nations, we have seen a number of key developments – including the convening of the first World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in 2014, the development of a UN system-wide action plan on the rights of indigenous peoples, and the ongoing discussions within the General Assembly on ways to enhance the participation of indigenous peoples at the United Nations.

Consistent with this, last October I appointed four advisers – two representatives of Member States, and two of Indigenous peoples – to assist me in conducting inclusive and transparent consultations to identify specific proposals.

These consultations provide an historic opportunity for the international community to further the realisation of the commitment under the *Declaration* for Indigenous peoples to participate in decision-making on matters that affect their rights.

We are currently entering the final phase of this process.

The advisers have worked closely with Member States and Indigenous peoples' representatives to produce a comprehensive draft text, which will form the basis for upcoming negotiations.

This draft was circulated last week, and the advisers plan to hold two sessions – on, 26 April, and on 3 May – to hear your initial views on this text.

I encourage all Member States and Indigenous peoples to participate in these dialogues, and to continue to extend their full support to the advisers.

Intergovernmental negotiations on the draft text will begin on 5 May, in order to be finalized by the General Assembly during this Session.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Of course, with Indigenous peoples continuing to suffer disproportionately from extreme poverty, social marginalization, systematic discrimination, and structural barriers to accessing healthcare and education, far more needs to be done to fully realise the human rights of all Indigenous peoples.

And in this regard, there is no more important mechanism than through the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Taken together, the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda provide humanity with a universal masterplan for building a safer, more prosperous, and more sustainable future for all.

This includes by eliminating extreme poverty, building peaceful and inclusive societies, increasing prosperity, reducing inequality, improving access to education, combating climate change, and protecting our natural environment.

To this end, recognising the particular vulnerability that Indigenous peoples face, we pursue targeted strategies to ensure that Indigenous peoples are able to fully participate in efforts to implement the Sustainable Development Goals.

It includes by providing opportunities to ensure that the voices, views and contributions of Indigenous peoples – particularly women – are heard and shape our implementation efforts, to ensure that development gains reach all Indigenous peoples.

It includes by ensuring Indigenous peoples are empowered with the education, skills and resources they need.

And it includes by ensuring that we address issues of particular importance to Indigenous communities, including conflict, climate change, deforestation, and the protection of Indigenous peoples' lands, and traditional livelihoods.

In this regard, I note that as part of our global efforts to conserve and sustainably use the resources of the Ocean, the Ocean Conference will be held here at United Nations Headquarters, from 5-9 June.

The Ocean Conference will convene Member States, multilateral agencies, civil society, the scientific community, and the business sector to foster the action needed to reverse the cycle of decline in the health of the ocean is currently caught.

The Conference will lead to three key outcomes, including a list of voluntary commitments that will serve as a compilation of humanity's best efforts to implement the ambitious targets of SDG14.

I encourage all of you that care about the health of the Ocean, to therefore register your voluntary commitments for action on the online registry at the Ocean Conference website.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Addressing the challenges facing Indigenous peoples requires that we all work together in a renewed spirit of cooperation. I therefore encourage you to take this opportunity to reaffirm your commitment to the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals for all.

I wish you a very productive session.

Thank you.