

MS. MARIAM WALLET ABOUBAKRINE

CHAIRPERSON

**ADDRESS TO THE HIGH-LEVEL EVENT TO MARK THE 10th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE UN DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

New York, 25 April 2017

Mr. Peter Thomson, President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly;

H.E. Mr Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia;

Ms Kyung-wha Kang, Assistant-Secretary-General to the Secretary-General of the United Nations;

Mr. Andrew Gilmour, Assistant-Secretary-General of the New York Office of Human Rights

Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Mr. Albert Barume, Chair of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Ministers and other high-level dignitaries from Member States

Representatives of Indigenous Peoples,

Sisters and Brothers, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour for me, on behalf of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, to address this high-level event to celebrate “*The Tenth Anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*”.

Let me first pay my respects to the Onondaga Nation and Peoples, the original inhabitants of this land and thank them for hosting us here today.

We are here to mark ten years since 13 September 2007, when the General Assembly in 2007 adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by an overwhelming majority. It was a historical day, when the Declaration was adopted after over two decades of intense negotiation. The adoption marked the beginning of a new partnership between indigenous peoples and Member States, who worked side by side in preparing the Declaration.

Today, we must thank all who have contributed to the making of the UN Declaration, and we look to future generations who will be taking the UN Declaration forward.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the most comprehensive international instrument on indigenous peoples' rights. It establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of indigenous peoples. With the four countries that initially voted against the Declaration having since reversed their positions, the Declaration today reflects global consensus on indigenous peoples' rights.

The Declaration is an important step forward for the recognition, promotion and protection of the rights and freedoms of indigenous peoples, and embodies rights that many of our peoples and ancestors have fought long and hard for. It sets out the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination, a key achievement in the struggle for recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples. The Declaration also outlines our rights to traditional lands, territories and resources, to education, culture, languages, health, and to freely determine our political status and to pursue a distinct vision of economic and social development. And in this context, the principle of free prior and informed consent is a critical factor.

Ten years on, we have seen some progress in the implementation of the UN Declaration. However, on the ground indigenous peoples continue to face exclusion, marginalization and major challenges in enjoying their basic rights. Where data exists, it shows consistent evidence of indigenous peoples living shorter lives, facing higher barriers to access education and health services and less voice in political processes than the non-indigenous. In some countries, there is still a need for recognition of indigenous peoples' identity, while in others countries, there is a gap between the formal recognition of indigenous peoples and the implementation of policies on the ground. There continues to be an urgent need for allocation of resources and, above all, for the political will to make the necessary changes.

During the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues' session this year, we will be discussing the situation of indigenous human rights defenders. According to Front Line Defenders, 281 human rights defenders were murdered in 25 countries in 2016. Half of them were working to defend land, indigenous and environmental rights. This is an enormous increase compared to the documented 185 killings of human rights defenders in 2015 and 130 in 2014. Just as worrisome are the daily violent attacks and threats, enforced disappearances, illegal surveillance, travel bans, criminalization as well as lawsuits that are frequently deployed to silence human rights defenders. It is essential that indigenous human rights defenders are protected, and that those responsible are brought to justice.

While major challenges remain, today we must also celebrate the achievements and gains. Constitutional and legislative frameworks that recognize indigenous peoples have been developed in some countries. Domestic and regional courts have used the Declaration to protect indigenous peoples' rights, and indigenous peoples themselves have increasingly participated in political processes nationally and globally to claim their rights.

We have also seen advancements globally, in particular with the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in 2014, where Member States reaffirmed their support to the UN Declaration and to taking legislative, policy and administrative measures at the national level to achieve the ends of the Declaration. The practice emerging from the World Conference of having advisers – representatives of Member States and Indigenous Peoples – assisting the President of the General Assembly is a crucial step towards mutual respect and cooperation. We welcome this in the ongoing consultations of the President of the General Assembly on participation at the United Nations.

The system-wide action plan on the rights of indigenous peoples shows the UN systems' dedication to support Member States in implementing the Declaration. We look forward to interacting with UN Agencies on how to take the plan forward, especially at the country level.

With the promise of “reaching the furthest behind first” and with the strong grounding in human rights, equality and non-discrimination, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides an important platform to improve the situation of indigenous peoples on the ground. This year, the Commission on the Status of Women considered “empowerment of indigenous women” as a focus area. The rights of indigenous women, as well as of indigenous youth, need special attention as they face specific challenges.

We have come far in the first ten years since the Declaration was adopted. We have much further to go in our struggle to secure the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of indigenous peoples.

I would like to call on Member States to make concrete commitments and pledges to fully implement the Declaration. Only by working together, can we make sure we fully achieve the ends of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples for indigenous peoples all over the world.

The Permanent Forum is committed to working with Member States and indigenous peoples so we can move forward in seeking creative solutions to address the challenges that remain.