



UNITED NATIONS

NATIONS UNIES

**MR. LIU ZHENMIN
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS,
AND SENIOR OFFICIAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM
TO COORDINATE FOLLOW UP TO THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON INDIGENOUS
PEOPLES**

TO BE DELIVERED BY ASG ELLIOT HARRIS

**OPENING SESSION OF THE TWENTIETH SESSION OF
THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES
New York, 19 April 2021**

Distinguished Chairperson, Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,

Distinguished Representatives of Member States, Indigenous Peoples' Organizations, UN system entities, intergovernmental organizations and civil society,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be here at the opening of the 20th session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. I would like to extend a very warm welcome to all of you. I hope that in 2022 the Permanent Forum will be able to conduct its session with the participation of all representatives in person.

The theme of this session, SDG 16 - peace, justice and strong institutions is aimed at promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions.

The targets under SDG 16 encompass some of the most important issues for indigenous peoples such as access to non-discriminatory justice, respect for the principle of free, prior and informed consent, recognition of indigenous institutions and participation, and their rights to lands, territories and resources. The impact of

historical injustices, often without redress or reconciliation is a major reason for the continue marginalization of Indigenous Peoples. The lack of recognition of their identity and their existence challenges their ability to live in dignity and peace.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues offer a space for global dialogue among Indigenous Peoples, Member States, UN entities and other relevant stakeholders to promote and strengthen the implementation of the rights and development of indigenous peoples around the world.

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs is proud to provide support to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The Under-Secretary-General has been designated as the senior UN official responsible for following up on the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples and the implementation of the System Wide Action Plan of 2015 on Indigenous Peoples.

To promote a wider implementation of the Action Plan particularly at country level, the Chief Executive Board, adopted a Call to Action last November. This Call to Action is to galvanize system-wide action to support the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Call to Action addresses key issues of importance for indigenous peoples and the UN system including building back better from the effects of COVID-19. It highlights discrimination, including against indigenous women and children, issues of land rights and the increasing number of related conflicts and reprisals against indigenous human rights defenders. It highlights the importance of the participation of indigenous peoples in decision-making process which recognizes that indigenous peoples are indispensable partners and contributors to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and to combat climate change.

The Call to Action calls on the UN system to focus on increasing the participation of indigenous peoples in UN processes, work to strengthen international cooperation to increase technical and financial assistance to support indigenous peoples' rights; and further support the implementation of the system wide action plan at the country level .

The call to Action further recognizes that the upcoming International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032) will provide an opportunity to draw

attention to the critical loss of indigenous languages and the urgent need to preserve, revitalize and promote them. DESA is pleased support the preparation and implementation of the Global Action Plan for the Decade.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Indigenous peoples have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. The devastating impact on indigenous peoples goes beyond the health threat. Access to vaccinations and health services that are culturally appropriate and in indigenous languages is very limited.

States of emergency are exacerbating the marginalization of indigenous peoples. In very few countries have indigenous peoples participated in policy responses to the pandemic. Further, in some countries, during COVID, consultations with indigenous peoples and environmental impact assessments have been suspended and megaprojects on indigenous peoples lands and territories have forged ahead.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I thank the Member States that have generously contributed to the Trust Fund on Indigenous Issues in 2020: Canada, Estonia, Denmark and Finland. It is through this Trust Fund that we support the follow-up the year-round work of the Permanent Forum and follow-up to its recommendations as well as the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We are here to support your efforts. DESA will continue its engagement and commitment to promote the rights of indigenous peoples.

I wish you all a successful and productive session of the Permanent Forum.

Thank you.