

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**  
**MESSAGE TO 20<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE**  
**PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES**  
**19 April 2021**

I am pleased to send greetings to this important forum.

Indigenous peoples represent 6.2 per cent of the world's population.

They represent the greater part of the world's cultural diversity, and they speak the major share of the world's languages.

However, they are also three times more likely to live in extreme poverty, and their languages and cultures are under constant threat.

Indigenous women and girls contend with higher rates of violence and experience disproportionately high levels of maternal and infant mortality.

Indigenous peoples have been particularly hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

An already vulnerable group risks being left even further behind.

The lack of participation of indigenous peoples in decision-making has often meant their specific needs are overlooked or ignored.

As we work to recover from the pandemic, we must prioritize inclusion and sustainable development that protects and benefits all people.

Indigenous peoples' lands are among the world's most biodiverse and resource-rich.

This has led to increased exploitation, conflicts over resources and land misuse.

Violence and attacks against indigenous leaders and women and men working to defend indigenous peoples' rights to lands, territories and resources have grown dramatically.

We must do better at fostering inclusive and participatory laws and policies, and strong and accountable institutions that provide justice for all.

We must promote and uphold the right to health and to a healthy and sustainable environment.

And we must implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous peoples are indispensable to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and their voices need to be heard.

Respect for their rights means ensuring equal and meaningful participation, full inclusion and empowerment.

I wish you all a successful forum as we work for the realization of human rights and opportunities for all indigenous peoples.

Thank you.