

Introduction of the Report on the 20th session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Distinguished Delegates,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues held its twentieth session over a two-week period from 19 April to 30 April. This was the Forum's first session in two years, due to the global pandemic. The pandemic also greatly affected this year's session with most of our meetings held virtually. I wish to thank the dozens of Member States that participated actively in the session. Your inputs were well received.

We also saw the active participation of indigenous peoples from all regions of the world. However, I must note that participation of indigenous peoples was quite limited at this year's session, and we saw clearly that the digital divide is very real for indigenous peoples. As we take stock of the lessons learned from the pandemic, it is crucial that we ensure greater access for all to information and communication technology, and this especially includes indigenous peoples who often live in remote and isolated areas. We must also remember that in-person dialogues and exchanges are irreplaceable ways of communicating and reaching consensus and they are essential for the Permanent Forum to implement its mandate effectively.

Having said this, under the circumstances, the session had a successful outcome, and it is my pleasure to introduce the report of the Permanent Forum today. This year's report contains a number of new and important recommendations and initiatives that are based on our deliberations, and the inputs received from Member States, indigenous peoples and the UN system. The special theme of the twentieth session was on peace, justice and strong institutions and the role of indigenous peoples in reaching Sustainable Development Goal number 16. During those discussions, it was reiterated that effective access to justice for indigenous peoples – through mechanisms that do not violate or threaten their rights - is essential. Further, States must recognize that indigenous peoples' own justice systems are pivotal to ensure their rights to maintain their autonomy, culture, and traditions.

The report highlights the importance of peace and security and the Forum is committed to facilitating a process among indigenous peoples and Member States with the aim of rethinking and supporting international efforts to ensure peace and security and create peacebuilding processes which also guarantee the effective participation of indigenous peoples.

The Permanent Forum continues to emphasize the importance of taking action at the country level to ensure the full and effective implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Such action includes legal reform and policy making in line with the Declaration and ensuring that these measures are followed up with effective administrative actions and programmes and that they are allocated the resources necessary to follow good words with meaningful action. This is not only important for indigenous peoples. This is good for all of our societies.

The Permanent Forum commits itself to continuing to facilitate regional dialogues with indigenous peoples and Member States. The Forum has also decided to focus specifically on a separate round of informal dialogues to support the development of guiding principles for the realization of the rights of indigenous peoples to autonomy and self-governance. I look forward to the active participation of Member States in these dialogues as there are many good examples from your countries that we wish to learn from and build upon.

Looking forward to next year, the Permanent Forum has identified the theme “Indigenous peoples, business, autonomy and the human rights principles of due diligence including free, prior and informed consent” as the special theme for the 21st session of the Permanent Forum. This is an important and timely theme given the increasingly important role that the private sector plays in matters that affect indigenous peoples, and I am confident that the Forum will provide important information and analysis to the Council on this theme.

I thank you for your consideration and I remain ready to answer any questions you may have.