

## ***Indigenous Peoples' right to education – a transformative force for empowerment***

*Message by the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples to mark the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, Tuesday 9 August 2016.*

The 2016 International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples offers an opportunity for the international community to reflect on the overall human rights situation of indigenous peoples, as the world prepares to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

This year's theme, *Indigenous Peoples' Right to Education*, enshrined in Article 14 of the Declaration and several other international instruments, is timely as States begin to take measures to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a view to leaving no one behind.

"Education is empowerment, and critical to the realization of all of the rights contained in the Declaration and international human rights treaties," stresses Claire Charters, Chair of the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples. "Unfortunately, indigenous children and youth often do not have access to adequate, accessible and appropriate forms of education. It is imperative that States, indigenous peoples, the United Nations and other stakeholders work together in order to increase awareness and efforts to ensure the fulfilment of this universal and fundamental human right."

This means working together to address the damaging history of colonization, marginalization and discrimination experienced by indigenous peoples. According to the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, "the available data shows a consistent pattern of disparity between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in terms of educational access, retention and achievement in all regions of the world. Additionally, the loss of indigenous knowledge especially in terms of ecosystem management and biodiversity conservation and sustainable use leads to the erosion of cultural and biological diversity. Support for the establishment of intercultural indigenous schools and universities should be provided. The situation of indigenous women and girls is of concern and special priority must be given to ensure women and girls have access to relevant education."

"States must engage and work constructively with indigenous peoples to address barriers to education, including stigmatization of indigenous identity, discrimination in schools, language barriers between students and teachers and inadequate consideration given to education for indigenous students," the Chair of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous

Issues, Alvaro Pop Ac underlines. “Efforts should be made to ensure that indigenous peoples have access to education that is culturally and linguistically appropriate.”

As Albert K. Barume, the Chair of EMRIP, notes “Education is key to addressing human rights violations, alleviating poverty and creating opportunities in economic, social and cultural spheres. The right to education also supports the commitments on the part of States to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specifically Goal 4 on inclusive and quality education for all.” In fact, EMRIP devoted its first study to indigenous peoples’ right to education, with a firm conviction that education is an indispensable means of realizing indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination and their capacity and ability to pursue their own economic, social and cultural development.

States should work with indigenous peoples in a spirit of partnership to restore forms of education based on indigenous languages, beliefs, values and culture and increase efforts to address discrimination in education that has the effect of impeding indigenous peoples’ rights to education. It is imperative that educational institutions are built on a human rights framework that is inclusive and respectful of indigenous peoples’ cultures, worldviews and languages.

Jointly, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, the United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) and the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples call upon States to ensure discrimination-free and culturally-sensitive education systems for indigenous peoples, taking into account their languages, cultures and histories. States and indigenous peoples must also work together to fulfil indigenous peoples’ right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions.