



**MESSAGE FROM  
H.E. DR. DANILO TÜRK  
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA**

**at the**

**High-level event to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the  
United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

**New York, 17 May 2012**

"I feel honoured by your invitation to take part at today's high level event of the eleventh session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. It is with my deep and sincere regret that due to previously scheduled obligations, I am not able to be with you on this occasion. Nevertheless, I wish to avail myself of this opportunity to share with you some of my thoughts on indigenous issues.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is one of the key instruments of the international law of human rights and a landmark document of international law in general. Moreover, it conveys strong ethical messages: a message of recognition of indigenous peoples as peoples, the message of the imperative to remedy historic injustice of which many indigenous peoples have been victims, and the message of acceptance of collective identities of indigenous peoples as parts of our global culture of humanity.

For many decades the United Nations' debates on indigenous peoples concentrated on various studies, which explained, in great detail, the situations of indigenous peoples, their grievances, their struggle and their aspirations. Indigenous peoples have been the most studied and the least understood among the many human groups legitimately claiming their human rights and the recognition of their distinct identities. Therefore the need for an international instrument on the rights of indigenous peoples clearly existed.

I am privileged to have had the opportunity, in my then capacity as a human rights expert, member of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, to take part in the preparation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I remember vividly the discussions on such fundamental concepts as the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination and the specific meaning of this right in the circumstances in which indigenous peoples live, their land rights, the rights of traditional livelihood and culture, the right of indigenous peoples to be called by their proper names and others.

The preparation of the Declaration required much more than legal drafting. Fundamental questions of individual and collective human rights had to be clarified in the process. Moreover, the quality and eventual success of the drafting process was ensured by the active and skilful participation of the representatives of indigenous peoples from various parts of the world. The process of technical drafting was accompanied by an extensive network of consultations between the representatives of the indigenous peoples, governments, human rights experts and NGO representatives. It was a learning experience of great magnitude, rarely seen in the international fora. All the participants learned a great deal in that process which was connected with the efforts of the indigenous peoples to improve their respective situations and sometimes included discreet negotiations between their representatives and the relevant governments on a variety of specific and vital issues affecting the indigenous peoples. It was a unique experience allowing for a continuous exchange of views among the representatives of indigenous peoples. That has helped in their own political activities back home and many positive changes have resulted from that experience.

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is a living document. Its adoption in 2007 after decades of work signified an important landmark in the struggle for human rights and improvement of life of indigenous peoples. As any landmark it represents a starting point from which progress can be measured anew. Today we have every reason to look at the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination as an evolving right, which offered an important platform for appropriate types of political and legal status of indigenous peoples, in accordance with their needs, and, in particular with their right to retain their distinct identity. The land rights of indigenous peoples have to be seen as fundamental and as an asset in the policy making for the protection of the natural environment. The right of indigenous peoples to the full and effective participation in all the matters affecting them represents a significant source for empowerment - not only for the indigenous peoples themselves, but also for the society at large.

I wish you every success in your deliberations. I wish the United Nations to continue the valuable work already begun on the basis of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The UN continues to represent the best, and sometimes the only hope for the improvement of the situations of indigenous peoples. Let the UN live up to its historic responsibility and let the assistance to the indigenous peoples progress.”