

Message from Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director UN Environment Programme (UNEP) on the Occasion of the 2011 International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples

Nairobi, 9 August 2011--The inextricable link between cultural and linguistic diversity and biodiversity is today celebrated on the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples under the theme "*Indigenous Designs: Celebrating Stories and Cultures, Crafting our own Futures*".

This link is underlined by the fact that the 17 most biologically rich countries, home to more than two-thirds of the Earth's biological resources, are also the traditional territories of most of the world's indigenous peoples.

These are among many reasons why UNEP is partnering with indigenous peoples in for example the Arctic, Africa and Small Island Developing States in order to bring to the attention of the global community these enduring and unique perspectives—ones that offer practical and inspiring solutions at a time of growing pressure on the finite natural resources and accelerating environmental change.

This year's international day comes less than 12 months before Rio+20: almost two decades after governments met in Brazil for the Earth Summit of 1992, nations are engaging on how to evolve sustainable development to meet the challenges but also realize the opportunities of the 21st century.

Regional meetings have or are being held where countries are shaping and sharpening their positions on the two twin themes—a Green Economy in respect to sustainable development and poverty eradication and an institutional framework on sustainable development.

Major groups, including indigenous peoples, farmers and trades unions, gather in Bonn, Germany in September and later in Cordoba, Spain, to forge their aims and aspirations for June 2012.

The momentum is building, in part because of a growing understanding of the urgent need to re-think our economies and reform an international system that is falling short of what is required.

A range of creative proposals, upon which governments could cooperate are also emerging ranging from redefining indicators of wealth beyond current GDP to re-evaluating perverse or harmful subsidies.

The missing link to date is wide-ranging political support. Brazil, as the host nation is signaling its determination to provide that leadership as are several heads of state in Africa, Asia and Europe.

The diversity of ideas and creative solutions of indigenous peoples needs to be part of this leadership given the inextricable link to improved management of the planet's nature-based assets. Only with the broadest engagement can the promise of Rio+20 be transformed into the kinds of profound and fundamental outcomes that reflect the urgency of a new age.