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**MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE WORLD'S
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

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It is a great joy for all of us to celebrate this special day with the indigenous peoples around the world who number more than 370 million in all the earth's regions. Today is a special day to remember and pay homage to all the elders, activists, leaders, men and women who are struggling for the rights of indigenous peoples. In 1994, this International Day of the World's Indigenous People was celebrated for the first time at the beginning of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People declared by the United Nations General Assembly. Since then, many indigenous peoples' nations, organizations and movements worldwide, and a number of governments made it a tradition to celebrate this historic day. It is an occasion for indigenous peoples and the world to assess where we are in our bid to have our human rights recognized and respected and to plan where we are going in the years to come.

This year the special theme is "*Indigenous designs: celebrating stories and cultures, crafting our own future*".

In many cultures, art and design in their multi-faceted declinations are time-honored traditions that have significant spiritual meaning and cultural purpose. In particular weaving represent a way of expressing indigenous peoples' identity, intellectual knowledge and culture, which are often transmitted from one generation to the next, but which sometimes do not yield the financial rewards that they should.

Weaving is a way to communicate our languages, our fears and our happiness. Clothing and fashion production may provide an opportunity to empower the voice of indigenous artists and artisans producers all around the world.

First of all, weaving helps preserve the intellectual and technical knowledge of indigenous peoples for generations as it express our values through our art and style. The symbols in the textiles often refer to images from indigenous peoples' history, spirituality and cosmological beliefs, and are often used to tell our stories: stories of harmony between culture and nature, between humans and the Mother Hearth, stories between grand mothers and grand children.

But fashion and design production may present opportunities for economic empowerment as well. Weaving for example is liberating for women because it can be done from home, meaning they can raise their families in the communities. Thus, women can make an income without having to leave for cities to find employment, presenting an alternative to rural flight. Indigenous weaving or clothing production is also key to environmental protection because of the use only of locally available materials and of sustainable harvesting and weaving practices.

In many indigenous communities there is a risk of losing their textile tradition. When confronted with the temptation to conform to industrial mass productions and global fashion trends, only few people continue to produce and wear their traditional indigenous costumes, although traditional dress is still used during ceremonies and festivals. But also, when forced to move from their habitat and territory, women loose the materials for weaving.

However, indigenous designs are threatened in several ways. Training, educational materials and equipment are frequently not afforded by indigenous communities, which are often organized in small cooperatives as opposed to the conventional industrialized textile companies. Therefore, mass industrial production has

an economic advantage that puts small-scale indigenous productions out of the market competition.

There are good practices that we would like to highlight today. Around the world, companies have been founded with the mission of forming a scalable artisan network that reflects a commitment to development with culture and identity, sustainability and socially responsible actions. From private companies established by indigenous peoples to Fair Trade cooperatives to non governmental organizations, a wide network of actors work with indigenous communities while maintaining and respecting their traditions, cultures and beliefs. However I would like stress the importance that indigenous peoples have to be fully and effectively involved and they have to be granted the right to express their free and informed consent on any activity or relationship that has an impact on their life and future. In the same way, I want to stress the fundamental importance of protecting, at both the international and country levels, the intellectual property rights of indigenous people that are expressed through the work of artists and artisans.

On the one hand, some indigenous artists have managed to establish profitable businesses based on indigenous designs, textiles and other forms of cultural expression and artistic tradition, with a significant impact on their communities. On the other hand, indigenous cultures are also influencing high fashion. Designers are drawing visual inspiration for their collection from indigenous traditions. Creatively speaking, indigenous details are often impersonated in fashion to eventually become huge trends once it is picked up by the masses. However, the questions remain around the manner in which famous brands and designers relate with indigenous communities. In fact, some indigenous communities may not even be aware of the use of their designs. These are issues that require further exploration.

Article 11 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples specifically refers to indigenous peoples' right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of our cultures, such as archaeological and historical

sites, artifacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.

In light of this, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has been placing priority on the development of the concept of development with culture and identity, in a process that includes strengthening of indigenous peoples, harmony and sustained interaction with our environment, sustainable use of natural resources and respect for the rights and values of indigenous peoples.

On this day, the sharing of the stories that lay behind each single piece of art by indigenous peoples is a great opportunity to look beyond appearances. Behind each piece of cloth or textile, behind each piece of art and design, there is a story and experience of an artist and artisan and his or her community. The position of being able to tell stories to create new understanding is one of great honour and it's an opportunity for indigenous artists and artisans to know they are privileged to have and will, no doubt, continue to do their best in creating new understanding to wider audiences about who they are and how relevant their stories have become.

In closing, I would like to salute the many indigenous artists and artisans who are out there, working long hours to produce their works and tell the stories of the struggles, and world views of their people. It is their hard work that not only educates the rest of the world, but also revitalizes and strengthens indigenous peoples' cultures for the generations who will come after us. Therefore, I would like to call on governments, inter-governmental organizations, industries and other relevant actors to support indigenous artistic expressions around the world, using the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a framework and tool for a respectful and constructive relation.