

15th Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

General Assembly Hall, 11:00am, 9 May 2016

**Opening remarks by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th session of the General Assembly**

Honourable Ministers, Ambassador Jürgenson, Under Secretary-General Wu, Excellencies,
Distinguished Representatives of Indigenous Peoples,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour to address this Fifteenth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and to welcome you all to United Nations Headquarters.

Nearly two years ago in September 2014, the General Assembly held the first World Conference on Indigenous Peoples where Member States reaffirmed their commitment to support, respect, promote, advance and in no way diminish the rights of indigenous peoples – and to uphold the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Building on that event, member states agreed in December last year to the landmark resolution 70/232.

It included a commitment to conduct consultations on possible measures necessary, including procedural and institutional steps and selection criteria, to enable the participation of indigenous peoples' representatives and institutions in meetings of relevant United Nations bodies.

In February, therefore, I appointed four Advisers to assist me in conducting these consultations and I circulated on 27 April the first draft compilation of views expressed during the electronic consultations, including on good practices within United Nations regarding the indigenous peoples' participation.

A further compilation of views will be prepared as we move forward to form the basis of draft text to be finalized and adopted by the Assembly during its seventy-first session.

I call upon all Members States, indigenous peoples, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to continue to work together to support this process.

In particular, I encourage you all to participate in the informal consultative meetings on 11 and 18 May and to provide concise inputs and suggestions.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, this is a crucially important process.

Since taking office, I have sought to advance openness, transparency and inclusion in how the UN General Assembly conducts its work.

To me, this includes the ability of indigenous peoples to engage at the UN on matters that affect them.

These are peoples, after all, who not only have a right to contribute or who can provide enriching input, but who have been targeted when they speak up and historically excluded at all levels resulting in great harm to their communities, their heritage, their livelihoods and even their identity.

The current consultations provide a historical opportunity for Member States and Indigenous Peoples to improve and strengthen the participation of indigenous peoples at the United Nations.

Furthermore, the theme that you will address during this 15th session of the Forum, “Indigenous Peoples: Conflict, Peace and Resolution”, is a critical one.

It comes during a year when member states are reflecting on how best to strengthen the UN’s role and effectiveness in the area of peace and security.

As you know, over the next two days, I am also organising a High Level Thematic Debate on this very subject.

Your discussions, therefore, will contribute to a larger debate and add an important and much needed perspective on the particular challenges for indigenous peoples in conflict and peace processes.

I am very pleased that the Permanent Forum members took the initiative to tackle such a difficult theme and I look forward to the outcome of your deliberations.

I wish you all a very successful and productive session.

Thank you.
