

PGA remarks during
Opening session of the 23rd Session of the UN Permanent Forum on
Indigenous Issues
15 April 2024, 11 am
GA Hall

Your Excellency, David Choquehuanca, Vice-President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia,

Your Excellency, Sônia Guajajara, Minister of Indigenous Peoples of the Federative Republic of Brazil,

Your Excellency, Paula Narváez, President of the Economic and Social Council,

Mr. Li Junhua, Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs,

Ms. Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, Chairperson of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I express my sincere gratitude for your invitation to address this **23rd Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.**

At the outset, I warmly congratulate you, Chair, Ms. Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, on your deserved election – a testament to women’s capacity for leadership. I wish you every success in fulfilling your important mandate.

I would also be remiss if I do not welcome all the Indigenous People present – including the distinguished **Chief of the Onondaga Nation, Tadodaho Sid Hill.**

This is indeed a special moment and I thank you all for being here. An important consequence of which is ensuring the representative character of this Forum – enriching both our intergovernmental deliberations and their outcomes.

(BRIEF PAUSE)

Excellencies,

The Permanent Forum is a befitting way to celebrate the remarkable diversity of indigenous peoples – and the most prominent global platform to discuss indigenous issues spanning economic and social development, cultural, environmental, education, health, and the human rights spheres.

Simultaneously, it provides an important moment to highlight the many peculiar challenges indigenous peoples confront in their daily lives.

At each session, this Forum candidly reviews the progress achieved and the obstacles faced in upholding the human rights of indigenous peoples. But we must also make full use of this opportunity and effectively guide our discussion, by addressing such important questions as:

What progress have we made for indigenous communities?

What can we learn from each other's experiences?

How do we ensure effective participation of Indigenous Peoples in the work of the United Nations system, so that their voices are always heard?

And, crucially, how do we ensure that our national, regional, and global endeavours align with the objectives of the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**?

(BRIEF PAUSE)

Excellencies,

The central philosophy of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** is to “*leave no one behind*”. To that end, it urges us to pay special attention to vulnerable communities – those who are most susceptible to being marginalized, left out and indeed left back.

We will have failed dismally to achieve the SDGs if we overlook the plight of indigenous peoples – or neglect to uphold their rights and dignity, and moreover, to promote their well-being.

Furthermore, we must acknowledge how these challenges intersect with the various gendered forms of discrimination – and barriers encountered, especially by indigenous women and girls.

Accordingly, not only must we ensure that indigenous women and girls are protected from violence; they must also be guaranteed equal access to quality education, healthcare, and economic resources - including land and natural resources.

(BRIEF PAUSE)

We have much to learn from Indigenous Peoples – who have long proven themselves to be responsible custodians of the natural resources of the planet; and **who, thankfully, preserve 80% of the world’s remaining biodiversity.**¹

For instance, the integration of traditional indigenous knowledge and innovations into agricultural and forestry practices can offer far reaching benefits for us all, including combatting climate change and food insecurity, and preventing desertification and land degradation.

¹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2023/08/09/empowering-indigenous-peoples-to-protect-forests>

Building on the longstanding contribution to sustainability by indigenous communities around the world, we all have a collective responsibility to ensure our actions do not damage the ecosystems that the indigenous peoples in particular depend on, as do we.

(BRIEF PAUSE)

Excellencies,

Indigenous youth have also become increasingly proactive in asserting their rights and in addressing some of humanity's most urgent issues - including the existential threat posed by climate change.

While actively supporting their endeavours –we must also recognize their distinct challenges.

One such challenge of great significance is preserving their indigenous heritage, language, and knowledge – as inevitably, they are caught in an unending struggle to navigate between modernity and tradition.

To enable them to benefit from both worlds, we must re-adapt our educational curricula to incorporate indigenous knowledge - celebrating our cultural diversity and shared human heritage.

Concurrently, we must also uphold the commitments we made at the General Assembly's launch of the **International Decade of Indigenous Languages** in 2022 – highlighting the urgent need to preserve, revitalize, and promote Indigenous languages; given the rapid pace at which they are disappearing.

(BRIEF PAUSE)

Excellencies,

This Wednesday, I will convene a High-level Event to commemorate the **tenth anniversary of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.**

I trust that the level of attendance will be robust.

In line with the mandate given by the General Assembly, you may recall that I have appointed the Permanent Representatives of Canada and Peru, to conduct **consultations on possible further measures necessary to enhance the participation of Indigenous Peoples' representatives and institutions in relevant United Nations meetings on issues affecting them.**

They will be assisted by two advisers representing you, the Indigenous Peoples who have been identified through the normal process and whose appointment I have recently announced.

I have full confidence that – with the support of the Advisers – the Co-facilitators will build on the progress achieved during previous sessions and the outcomes of the three hearings convened by my predecessors.

There is no doubt that meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples in the work of the United Nations is necessary for the realization of sustainable development for all. You deserve to have your voices heard and indeed heeded.

I therefore encourage you to actively engage in this process – and trust that you will extend your full support and cooperation to the Co-facilitators and Advisers.

I wish you fruitful discussions during this important and timely Forum – as we also prepare for the Summit of the Future in September.

I thank you.