

CHAIRPERSON
**ADDRESS TO THE OPENING OF THE 11th SESSION OF THE PERMANENT
FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES - NEW YORK, 7 MAY 2012**

Hadih!

Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ms Asha-Rose Migiro; Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, Mr. Thomas Stelzer; Minister of Communication and Relations with the Parliament, Republic of Congo, Mr. Bienvenu Okiemy; Distinguished Expert Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues; Distinguished observers from Member States, Indigenous Peoples' Organizations, the Inter-Governmental system, non-governmental organizations, the academia and the media, and (in particular) our Indigenous sisters and brothers, elders and youth and Indigenous parliamentarians:

I extend my sincere gratitude to my Colleagues for their confidence in and support for my nomination, "Mussi Cho".

It is with my great pleasure that I welcome all of you here today at this eleventh session of the Permanent Forum.

I want to acknowledge the Onondaga Nation, in particular, Tado/daho Sid Hill, the traditional Chief of the Onondaga Nation, and to say "nawe," "thank you", for the welcome into this beautiful territory once again, and reminding us of all of our ancient relationships to all and everything, and to the land.

I would also like to acknowledge our Mayan elders, Virginia Ajxup and Juan Sapil and also say "thank you" for their invocation.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge my colleagues, the Expert Members of the Permanent Forum and their remarkable depth of knowledge, skill, commitment and experience and thank them for their unwavering commitment in fulfilling the Permanent Forum's mandate and for supporting the implementation of its recommendations.

Over the past year, in our capacity as Expert members, we have engaged in various processes at the national, regional and international levels to continually raise awareness on issues of importance to Indigenous peoples. We have tried very hard to promote and ensure, as part of good governance and taking a human rights-based approach to development, the participation of indigenous peoples. Creating space for their effective participation in United Nations processes and mechanisms is absolutely necessary when designing and implementing policy, programmatic frameworks and projects. This remains a fundamentally important principle.

I also thank the representatives of Indigenous peoples' organizations and nations; the members of the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues; and governments who, likewise, have taken steps to implement the Forum

own self-determination, development visions and priorities. I know it is an incredibly difficult challenge.

I acknowledge your statement, and thank you, Ms. Deputy Secretary-General.

We should always remember that Indigenous peoples and their issues are the very reason for the existence of the Permanent Forum. In that regard I was advised yesterday by Indigenous leaders and youth that many had spent considerable time and resources to attend this forum only to find they would not be able to attend all the incredibly important discussions because of space restrictions. I wish to appeal for support from those here to the appropriate level of authority, who can assist in helping to overcome this difficult obstacle.

There is an incredibly urgent need for all of us, Indigenous Peoples' organizations and nations, interagency support groups, states (and various funds established to support Indigenous Peoples) and the United Nations to take collaborative and coordinated actions, bold and effective, to address the continued discrimination, racism, marginalization, extreme poverty and conflict faced by Indigenous Peoples. Indifference to these drastic issues should not be tolerated because as we well know, indifference is the breeding ground for intolerance.

The members of the Permanent Forum are especially thankful to the Government of Nicaragua for hosting our pre-session meeting which took place February 21-24, 2012 in Managua, Nicaragua. The pre-session meeting allowed the Members to plan and decide the necessary arrangements for this very important eleventh session. We also welcomed the meetings with Latin American Indigenous Networks and Comunidades del Pacifico y Centro Norte de Nicaragua, representatives of the UN Country Team, with Multilateral and bilateral donors and officials of the Nicaraguan Government.

Let me now turn to some of the work that needs to be considered over the next two weeks.

This eleventh session of the Permanent Forum has devoted its special theme to the "The Doctrine of Discovery: its enduring impact on indigenous peoples and the right to redress for past conquests (articles 28 and 37 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples)". This is an incredibly important theme for Indigenous peoples as many of us have long histories of colonization. We need to address this difficult past and establish ways to move forward beyond the continued and unacceptable discrimination, marginalization, extreme poverty and conflict.

This afternoon, there will be a panel discussion on this theme which will take place at 3pm in Conference Room 1.

In this session, we will also discuss combating violence against Indigenous Women and Girls. It saddens us all to say that this continues to be a real issue in

organized by the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum and was attended by Permanent Forum members, Indigenous experts from the seven regional areas, other experts (including from the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), States, United Nations entities, Indigenous peoples' organizations and non-governmental organizations. The conclusions and recommendations of that Expert Group meeting will provide an important framework for the discussions in this 11th session. The Expert Group meeting report was adopted by consensus at the joint session and is included among the documents for this session.

There will also be two half-day sessions: The first Half-day will be a regional discussion on Central and Eastern Europe, the Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia on Friday; and next Monday, there will be a Half-day discussion on the rights of indigenous peoples to food and food sovereignty.

The agenda item focusing on human rights will take place next week, with a critical focus on the Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. As well there will be an important and necessary dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples and with (the Chair of) the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. As you are probably aware, the Special Rapporteur has just completed his country visit to the United States.

We will also have a discussion on the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples to be held in 2014; as well there will be a high-level event to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

These are just some of the highlights of issues to be covered during this eleventh session.

We have a very full agenda of activities, including many side and cultural events. The Permanent Forum's cultural event on Tuesday (tomorrow) evening will open an exhibition devoted to Indigenous Peoples and Food Sovereignty. The New Zealand Mission to the United Nations, along with other States contributing, will host the reception. It is organized by the Department of Public Information and the UN NGO Committee for the Second Decade, as well as the Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. There will also be a reception for the exhibition of the artworks from the Balgo Hills hosted by the Australian Government on the evening of Tuesday the 15th of May.

In closing, I would like to reiterate my gratitude to my Permanent Forum colleagues for acting on their important roles and tackling these challenges. This includes the implementation of the Permanent Forum's recommendations and also raising awareness of issues important to Indigenous peoples. When I was appointed to this Forum as an expert member I was given a hand crafted leather medicine pouch by Chief Wilton Littlechild...and I was advised that in it was the hopes and prayers of

between sessions. Finally, I would like to pay tribute to Indigenous peoples of the world who continue the struggle for their rights, sometimes sacrificing their own lives in the process. I call on all of us to work together to make meaningful and worthwhile changes for the survival, dignity and well-being of all Indigenous peoples.

Thank You.