

UNITED NATIONS



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UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

**Opening remarks
Twenty-third session of the
United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

**15 April 2024, 10:45 a.m. (Delivery of remarks at around 11:05am)
General Assembly Hall, UNHQ, New York**

**Distinguished Chairperson,
Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous
Issues,
Honourable elders,
Distinguished representatives,
Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

**Welcome to the 23rd session of the UN Permanent
Forum on Indigenous Issues.**

This session takes place at a critical point in our development journey.

We are now in the second half of implementing the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. Regrettably, at last year's SDG Summit we faced the stark reality that progress on the 2030 Agenda had stalled and, in some cases, even reversed.

However, Member States have risen to this challenge with renewed commitment and hope. Stakeholders from all sectors and backgrounds pledged to accelerate action that bridges divides, promotes inclusion, and spurs transformation toward a more resilient and sustainable future.

Against this global backdrop, the growing breadth and diversity of representation at each session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous

Issues is heartening. It reflects the increasing commitment by all stakeholders to engage with and support Indigenous Peoples on the issues that affect them most.

Among the more than 2000 participants at this year's Form, are representatives of around 200 Indigenous Peoples' organizations and 160 non-governmental organizations, as well as UN-system partners and other international organizations, parliamentarians, and academics.

We must leverage this opportunity to ensure that the next phase of action fully engages and addresses the priorities of Indigenous Peoples.

As we approach the Summit of the Future in September and work together in shaping its outcome, The Pact for the Future, the Secretary-General has

emphasized our duty as humanity to act and think with a long-term perspective and to deliver more for those who have traditionally been marginalized, including Indigenous Peoples. Distinguished representatives,

The special theme of this year’s Forum is *“Enhancing Indigenous Peoples’ right to self-determination in the context of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: emphasizing the voices of Indigenous youth”.*

The right of self-determination, including the autonomy and self-governance of Indigenous Peoples, is recognized in Articles 3 and 4 of the Declaration.

In past sessions, Indigenous Peoples have underscored the urgency of defending their lands, territories, resources, cultures and ways of life. This

collective right, enshrined in international law, enables Indigenous Peoples to freely determine their own political status and to pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

Young people are increasingly central to the exercise of this collective right.

Out of the approximately 476 million Indigenous Peoples in the world, close to 45 per cent are between 15 and 30 years of age.

They inherit the critical responsibility of protecting and preserving their traditional knowledge, cultures, languages and identities as passed down by their elders.

Yet, Indigenous youth continue to face significant barriers-including high rates of unemployment,

discrimination and marginalization, displacement from their lands and loss of their cultures and languages.

To right these wrongs, the engagement of Indigenous Peoples, including Indigenous women and youth, must evolve beyond tokenism. We must ensure their genuine decision-making power and impact.

With this in mind, I am heartened by the number of Indigenous youth who will participate in this year's Forum.

Furthermore, support from donors can finance initiatives led by Indigenous Peoples to ensure that their rights are protected and their aspirations are fully realised.

We need scaled-up long-term, predictable, and direct funding to Indigenous Peoples, including through public, private, and Indigenous-led funding mechanisms that effectively engage Indigenous women and youth.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This year marks one decade since the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. I am happy to report that we continue to promote implementation of the UN System-Wide Action Plan on Indigenous Peoples that was developed in the aftermath of that conference.

This work is carried out by the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues, composed of over 42 UN system entities and led by my Department, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs as the

permanent co-chair of the inter-agency group. With support from our current co-chair, the World Health Organization, the Group has continued to promote the rights of Indigenous Peoples throughout the UN system. This includes ongoing work to develop indicators to track the system's support for implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Excellencies,

Allow me a moment to provide a few words of thanks and encouragement.

Thank you to those Member States that have generously contributed to the Trust Fund on Indigenous Issues over the past year – Canada, Denmark, Finland and Estonia. Through your contributions, my Department has been able to

strengthen support for the work of the Permanent Forum both during and after the annual session.

Relatedly, I wish to invite and encourage Member States to consider hosting future pre-sessional meetings of the Permanent Forum. These pre-sessional meetings are vital in supporting Forum Members to prepare for the annual session.

I look forward to the contributions that the Forum will make to advancing the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and to securing the future of all people and the planet.

Thank you.
