



Remarks to the Twelfth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

by H.E. Ambassador Abulkalam Abdul Momen

Vice-President of the United Nations General Assembly

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[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

Under-Secretary-General

President of the Economic and Social Council

Distinguished Elders,

Distinguished Representatives of Indigenous Peoples' Organization,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to address the opening ceremony of the Twelfth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

It is more than 20 years since the General Assembly first formally welcomed you to this august chamber to participate in the International Year of the World's Indigenous People.

Many of you have traveled from distant corners of the world to be here today to participate in the Permanent Forum. I thank you for your engagement and your ongoing dedication to promoting the rights of your peoples.

I would like to congratulate Mr. Kanyinke Sena on his election, this morning, as Chairperson of the Forum.

Excellencies,

This annual gathering continues to provide an exceptional opportunity for collaboration and dialogue between indigenous peoples, Member States, the United Nations System and other intergovernmental organizations, as well as civil society.

The General Assembly has played a determining role in the promotion of issues that concern the Forum, not least by adopting in 2007, by an overwhelming majority, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This seminal document states that: “indigenous peoples in the exercise of their rights should be free from discrimination of any kind.”

It remains a landmark instrument of the international law of human rights and the embodiment of normative principles to which we all must aspire if we are to stimulate and enact positive change.

It conveys inalienable ethical messages—the recognition of indigenous peoples for who they are, the imperative to remedy historical wrongs and the acceptance of traditional practices as part of the global culture of mankind.

The challenge we face today is to, not just adopt, but fully and effectively implement the Declaration and to ensure that the inherent rights to which it refers are respected and promoted. These rights are derived from the political, economic and social structures of indigenous peoples and their communities as well as their cultures, spiritual traditions, histories and philosophies.

It is my belief that partnerships are crucial in achieving this objective.

This Forum can and should play a central dynamic role in charting future strategies. However, the preamble to the Declaration states clearly that the United Nations System has an important and continuing role in promoting indigenous rights.

A wide range of departments, agencies and programmes within the UN are involved in activities that affect indigenous peoples across the globe. It is the responsibility of the UN to ensure these activities are as streamlined and complementary as possible.

Excellencies,

This is a review year when hundreds of recommendations in three out of the six Permanent Forum-mandated areas—health, education and culture—will be scrutinized and evaluated.

Despite significant progress, it is imperative to acknowledge that many indigenous peoples continue to face marginalization, oppression, extreme poverty and other human rights violations that threaten their ways of life and, in some cases, their very survival.

Cases of land confiscation and the suppression of cultural activities are still being documented in various parts of the world, as is the unrestrained exploitation of ancestral territories for mining, logging and other extractive industries.

This abuse weighs heavily on the conscience of mankind and must stop.

Excellencies,

In September 2014, the General Assembly will convene a high-level plenary meeting, entitled The World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

The main objectives are to share perspectives and best practices on the realization of individual rights and to further pursue the objectives of the Declaration.

This is a unique moment for the Permanent Forum, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, to focus on its contribution towards change. I respectfully urge that

Member States work with all actors to find a common understanding on themes for this plenary as well as the content of the outcome document.

The period leading up to this Conference coincides with the preparations and ongoing consultations for the elucidation and definition of the post-2015 development agenda, a task which was handed to the General Assembly by world leaders at the Rio+20 summit last June.

As we transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals, it is my opinion, that it is essential that indigenous peoples are encouraged to voice their vision of sustainable development.

The MDGs contain no specific reference to indigenous peoples, an omission to which the Permanent Forum has referred to in the past.

The Conference can provide a framework for how these issues can be properly integrated into the post-2015 sustainable development agenda. It is important to acknowledge that this agenda which will undoubtedly frame much of the work of the United Nations for decades to come.

Excellencies,

The survival of indigenous cultures is proof of the strength and resilience of these traditional societies. Even though language, mores, ancestry and values may differ between communities in different parts of the world, these disparate threads are woven into a common fabric that binds you together into one global family within our United Nations.

As a unified group, your voice is louder and stronger. I encourage you to use this Permanent Forum as a platform to express your hopes and aspirations.

It is my belief that your experience and opinions are increasingly valued by the international community.

In that regard, I would like to leave you with the words of Chief Oren Lyons, a Native American faithkeeper and human rights advocate. Speaking in 2007, he said: “The voice of indigenous peoples are beginning to carry weight again, authority, for the simple reason that they always had responsibility for the future, and they always took the long-range view.”

I wish you a successful and productive Twelfth Session.

Thank you for your attention.