



HOLY SEE

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**Statement by H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore
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Permanent Observer of the Holy See**

**Economic and Social Council
9th session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

**On Item 3:
Discussion on the special theme for the year:
*Indigenous peoples: development with culture and identity:
articles 3 and 32 of the United Nations Declaration
on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples***

New York, 20 April 2010

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, my delegation would like to commend you, Mr. Chairman, for your conducting of this session and wishes you every success in your endeavours.

This year's special theme: "*Indigenous peoples: development with culture and identity*" draws our particular attention in the aftermath of the devastating financial crisis, which has hit hard also the indigenous population. Taking this into account, the Holy See through its multifaceted organizations and grass-roots level structures has extended its programs and projects for the comprehensive advancement of indigenous peoples.

It is heartening to see that after the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, despite the shortfalls and slow pace in certain sectors, promising progress has been achieved on indigenous issues, as laudable attempts are being made to preserve their culture and patrimony.

The shift of development policies in favor of respect for local cultures, including indigenous cultures, is long overdue. By integrating culture into development policies, there undoubtedly will be more effective results. However, this process is not self-evident. It needs some preliminary clarifications. For instance, which comes first: culture or development? Which must be integrated with which? May cultures follow any developmental model and ethic or must development integrate the ethic of different cultures?

The Holy See considers it fundamental to have a holistic vision of development which entails the well-being of the whole person and of the entire community and emphasizes in particular the dimension of cultural identity. In this line, the objective of development is inextricably linked with the alleviation of poverty and the lifting of living standards of each and every person in a sustainable manner which includes cultural, social, spiritual, institutional, juridical, economic and educational dimensions. The traditional indigenous vision of development focuses on human development in its entirety and understands that the earth and environment are sacred and good for our use; these gifts, needed for human existence, should not be abused. Such resources should not be reduced to mere economic assets as they also form an important basis for their social and cultural integrity and identity. A human rights-based approach to development that takes into account collective rights and the ethos of benefit-sharing that affirms their vital connection to their lands and territories needs to be promoted. In addition to the economic dimension, development must include also social, cultural and spiritual elements. Their deep sense of religious consciousness, of family and of community

cohesiveness and desire for living in a strong symbiosis with nature must be respected. Any developmental program in an indigenous zone that does not respect these cultural traits can do more harm than good.

Fostering indigenous culture does not mean always going back to the past, but entails going forward maintaining traditionally transmitted values and principles. Indigenous culture is based on time-honoured and collective values, enriched through the promotion of traditional ways of learning and transferring knowledge. Respect for human life and dignity, representative decision-making processes, the practice of justice mechanisms and ceremonies are important. In the face of modernization, industrialization and urbanization, these values must not be overlooked. This necessitates promoting understanding and respect for indigenous culture. Indigenous peoples must be able to choose their language, practice their religion, and actively participate in shaping their culture.

Cultural liberty as a human right of the indigenous peoples and respect for their ethnicity, religion, and language must be ensured. In preserving their cultural heritage, promotion of indigenous languages and intercultural education is critical. In this spirit, the Holy See promotes centers of indigenous languages, oversees compiling of grammar books and commissions hundreds of translations into those languages, often menaced by natural extinction. A wide range of such collections are available for researchers in different Pontifical Universities and institutes of higher education. Furthermore, just to speak of this metropolis, New York City, 25 languages other than English, including many indigenous languages, are being used on a regular basis for official rites and prayers of the Catholic Church.

The Holy See is committed to the promotion of cultural development, targeting the human and spiritual enrichment of populations. The leadership of the elders of every community is crucial in this regard and calls for their wise reflection and daring foresight. The formation of the younger generations and comprehensive education in such cultural values are very important.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, my delegation would like to express its satisfaction that more and more States are showing a political gesture in adopting the Declaration and hopes that the entire UN membership will eventually adopt it so that the value and dignity of the centuries-old cultural patrimony of the indigenous peoples will be more fully respected, which cannot but contribute to promoting peace among peoples and nations.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.