

UNITED NATIONS



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**MR. WU HONGBO
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS,
AND SENIOR OFFICIAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM
TO COORDINATE FOLLOW UP TO THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON INDIGENOUS
PEOPLES**

**OPENING SESSION OF THE FIFTEENTH SESSION OF
THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES**

New York, 9 May 2016

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,
Honorable Elders,
Distinguished representatives of Indigenous Peoples' Organizations,
Distinguished representatives of the UN system, other inter-governmental organizations and of
civil society,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor to address the opening of the fifteenth session of the Permanent Forum on
Indigenous Peoples.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to all of you – representatives from indigenous
peoples, Member States, the UN system and from Non-Governmental Organizations, who have
gathered here to work together to advance the rights and well-being of indigenous peoples.
Welcome.

As you know, at the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, Member States
adopted strong commitments to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of
Indigenous Peoples. The World Conference also included some important mandates for the UN
system, including myself. We take these mandates very seriously and we have been working
hard to fulfill them.

One clear mandate for the UN was to develop a system-wide action plan for ensuring a
coherent approach to achieving the ends of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
Over the course of more than 10 months the UN system worked through the Inter Agency
Support Group on indigenous issues to prepare the action plan. Indigenous peoples themselves
participated extensively through questionnaires as well as in-person consultations. I would also
like to thank the members of the Permanent Forum, the Expert Mechanism and the Special
Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples for their valuable inputs and expert advice in
this process.

The system-wide action plan is now ready – and I am honored to formally launch it with you today.

Distinguished representatives,

One of the key action areas in the plan is awareness raising. During our consultations with indigenous peoples as well as with Member States, this issue came up repeatedly. Clearly, more needs to be done to raise awareness about the Declaration and about the situation of indigenous peoples throughout the world. This is something we must all work on together – indigenous peoples, Member States and the UN System.

Another important element of the action plan is to support the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the country level. Earlier this year, my Department and UNDP called upon UN Country Teams to fully engage in implementing this action plan. We sent the action plan to all United Nations Resident Coordinators asking them to share the action plan with their host Government and take concrete steps to implement it in close coordination with the relevant indigenous peoples.

The action plan also calls for promoting the rights of indigenous peoples in the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals should include a focus on indigenous peoples, who are among the furthest behind.

Distinguished delegates,
Distinguished Chairperson and Members of the Forum,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me highlight that because of your engagement and contribution, indigenous peoples' priorities are reflected in the Paris Conference on Climate Change, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

Now the focus is on implementation. Now is the time for the United Nations system to work hand in hand with indigenous peoples and Member States for the common good of us all.

Let's also use this opportunity to thank the Member States that contributed to the Trust Fund on Indigenous Issues in 2015. It is through this Trust Fund that we directly support the substantive work of the Forum and raise awareness of the situation of indigenous peoples.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the Government of Guatemala for graciously hosting the pre-session meeting of the Permanent Forum in April this year, and for providing Forum Members with a valuable opportunity to gain better insight into the situation of indigenous peoples in your country.

There is much work to be done. Indigenous peoples continue to suffer disproportionately from poverty, discrimination, poor healthcare and inadequate education. These challenges are very real and they are serious, but with concerted efforts we can make a difference. I look

forward to the deliberations during the session and especially to your proposals and recommendations on how we best can move forward.

I wish you all a successful and fruitful session of the Permanent Forum.

Thank you.
