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**2<sup>nd</sup> session of the  
Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**



**Opening Remarks  
Ms. Navanethem Pillay  
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**

**Monday, 10 August 2009, 10h00  
Palais des Nations, Room XX**

Mr. President of the Human Rights Council,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Experts,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to open the second session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I would like to warmly welcome the members and express my best wishes for a successful session. Furthermore, it is a special pleasure for me to welcome the many indigenous representatives from all region of the world, including the recipients of our Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations. I would also like to welcome all other observers, representatives of Member States, colleagues from the United Nations system, and non-governmental organizations as well as representatives of regional human rights mechanisms and national human rights institutions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

After decades of deliberations and gradual steps, the international community has in recent years made considerable headway regarding the rights of indigenous peoples. In terms of human rights standards, we have seen developments under UN and regional human rights treaties, as well as other progress, crowned by the landmark adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007.

The Declaration offers a framework to advance the rights of indigenous peoples through dialogue between States, indigenous peoples, the United Nations system and others concerned.

I am pleased to note that support for the Declaration keeps expanding. Significantly, some States that previously were reluctant to accept the Declaration, notably Australia and Colombia (*and New Zealand*), have now endorsed it. I look forward to further steps towards universal acceptance of this significant human rights instrument.

My Office is committed to be a frontline advocate of universal acceptance and implementation of the Declaration and will continue to support human rights mechanisms dealing with the rights of indigenous peoples. Indeed, these rights are, and will remain, a priority area for OHCHR.

Our common aim is to contribute concrete and lasting improvements in the protection of human rights of indigenous peoples. And we all know that this crucial work is still far from complete.

States have recognized that the implementation of human rights standards greatly benefits from the work of expert mechanisms. The UN human rights treaty bodies have a key role to play in this respect, and so do the mechanisms devoted specifically to indigenous peoples' rights, including the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and, of course, this Expert Mechanism.

While your mechanism is the newest in the UN "toolbox", I believe it is already emerging as a key actor. It can make a significant contribution to the advancement of the rights of indigenous peoples by providing the Human Rights Council with well-grounded, independent and constructive thematic advice.

At this session, you are expected to adopt your first thematic study crucially devoted to the right of indigenous peoples to education. Essential in itself, this right is also key to the fulfillment of many other human rights. I trust that your advice on this and future themes will be fully taken into account by the Human Rights Council, and drawn upon in such contexts as the Universal Periodic Review, so that it translates into genuine human rights improvements at the national level.

Indeed, the publication of your thematic studies should not be seen as the end of a process. Rather, they should be a launching pad for concrete follow-up activities. My Office stands ready to support such initiatives.

I believe that one of the central features of this mechanism is the input by observers, including representatives of indigenous peoples. Your contributions help to

build a tight link between real, everyday challenges the indigenous peoples face and the international community. Similarly, participation of regional human rights mechanisms, national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations is crucial to develop an effective human rights based approach and to build synergies. Equally important is the input by, and constructive dialogue with, governments whose engagement is a *sine qua non* for achieving true positive impact at the national level and in intergovernmental processes. For example, a frank dialogue between States and the Expert Mechanism can also help to ensure that lines of communication remain constantly open at the Human Rights Council, thus enabling the Council to address promptly situations and issues of concern by factoring in the Expert Mechanism's advice.

Finally, I would like to stress the importance of cooperation between various UN mechanisms dealing with indigenous peoples and welcome the presence of the Special Rapporteur and a representative of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in this session. Through close contacts and mutually reinforcing work, we can maximize resources for optimal outcomes. To this effect, I have recommended to the Council that my report on the rights of indigenous peoples and those of the Special Rapporteur and of the Expert Mechanism are all considered annually and at the same session of the Human Rights Council. This would enhance synergies, help to raise the profile of indigenous issues and facilitate participation of indigenous representatives in the work of the Council – all important factors in our common efforts to make human rights a reality for indigenous peoples around the world.

I wish you every success in your deliberations and work.

Thank you.