

Check against delivery

**3rd session of the
Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**



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

**Monday 12 July 2010, 10h00
Geneva, Palais des Nations, Room XX**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Experts,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to open the third session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I would like to warmly welcome the members of the Expert Mechanism, and congratulate them for their invaluable contribution. I also welcome representatives of Member States, colleagues from the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and representatives of regional human rights mechanisms and national human rights institutions. Furthermore, it is a special pleasure for me to welcome the indigenous representatives from all regions of the world, including the recipients of the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations. Your active participation is essential for the success of this session and the work of the Expert Mechanism in general.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the 2nd session of the Expert Mechanism in August 2009, we have seen a number of significant developments in our common quest to advance the rights of indigenous peoples.

I would like, in particular, to highlight the fact that support for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples keeps expanding, including in the four countries that originally voted against the Declaration. I welcome the endorsement of the Declaration by New Zealand earlier this year, which, together with the endorsement of the Declaration by Australia last year, further strengthens the role of the Declaration as our shared tool and framework for action both at the international and national level. In this respect, I am also encouraged by the recent announcement by the Government of Canada that it will take steps towards endorsing this fundamental document. For its part, the United States Government has pledged to review its position regarding the Declaration.

While we should recognise and celebrate such progress in human rights, we must remain vigilant and not lose sight of the fact that, in the past year, we have also witnessed a range of violations of the rights of indigenous peoples.

In all regions of the world, indigenous peoples continue to face discrimination, violations of their right to land and, all too often, to the fundamental right to life. They are often excluded from decision-making processes and face serious problems in such fields as health, education and environmental sustainability. These are aspects that I would also like to highlight in September of this year, as the MDG Summit aims to accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

Identifying such problems is often much easier than filling gaps and applying human rights standards in practice. In our common search for solutions, expert guidance is always crucial. The Expert Mechanism can play a key role by providing sound and constructive thematic expertise, studies and research-based advice to the Human Rights Council. You have already demonstrated this through the first thematic study on the right to education, which was well received by the Human Rights Council. I would like to encourage all stakeholders present here today to put those

valuable results to active use, as you address issues related to education and indigenous peoples.

The current thematic focus of the Expert Mechanism - the right to participate in decision-making - is also a topic of paramount importance. Significantly, it was chosen by the Human Rights Council on the basis of a specific proposal made by the Expert Mechanism at its 2nd session. This is another sign of the trust and collaboration that you have built with the Council.

Similarly, access to education, and participation in decision-making are not only human rights in and of themselves, but they are often also key factors in improving the implementation of many other human rights standards. My new Strategic Management Plan for 2010-2011 highlights the need to counter discrimination as a thematic priority, including discrimination in access to education and in participation in decision-making. In this context, let me recall our support for the work of the Expert Mechanism, which we provide both for its plenary sessions and for its inter-sessional thematic work.

Moreover, my Office has increasingly engaged with the members of the Expert Mechanism in other activities. For example, we have drawn on their expertise to encourage the absorption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by national human rights institutions, which is an issue that was highlighted by the Expert Mechanism last year. There has also been follow-up to the proposals made by the Expert Mechanism to expand the mandate of the Voluntary Fund on Indigenous Populations in order to support participation of indigenous representatives also in human rights treaty bodies and in the Human Rights Council. As requested by the Council, my Office will present a report on this proposed expansion and its implications at the next session of the Human Rights Council.

Challenges in ensuring improved implementation of the rights of indigenous peoples are both serious and numerous. In order to meet them, we must maximize the use of our limited resources. This requires coordination and contacts, including among the three UN mandates devoted to indigenous peoples' issues. The sessions of the Expert Mechanism and of the Permanent Forum are important occasions to pursue such contacts. I would like to welcome the presence of the Chair of the Permanent Forum and of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people in this session. Furthermore, my Office has, together with our colleagues in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, facilitated inter-sessional exchanges and meetings between the mandates and their secretariats. We intend to continue this valuable practice. Another example of enhanced coordination and contacts is the fact that my annual report on the rights of indigenous peoples and the reports of the Special Rapporteur and of the Expert Mechanism are now all presented at the same session of the Human Rights Council.

I also attach great importance to inter-agency co-operation. My Office continues to play an active role in the Inter-agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues. This year, together with ILO and UNDP, we created a new United Nations Indigenous Peoples Partnership to support joint work on the rights of indigenous peoples, in particular at the country level.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I trust that during your discussions you will gather the views and experiences not only of indigenous peoples and their advocates, but also those of Governments. It is only through common efforts, and critical analysis regarding successes and obstacles, that we can achieve lasting progress.

Finally, given that this is the last session of the Expert Mechanism in its current composition, I would like to pay tribute to the work carried out by the first five members of the Expert Mechanism. You have launched this new body in an exemplary manner through your sound and constructive approach, providing a good basis on which your successors can now continue to build. I would like to reiterate the commitment of my Office to fostering implementation of the rights of indigenous peoples and to helping the Expert Mechanism to receive the support it needs in fulfilling its important tasks.

I wish you every success in your deliberations and work.

Thank you.