

REMARKS AT THE HIGH-LEVEL EVENT TO COMMEMORATE THE 5TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ADOPTION OF THE UN DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

New York, 17 May 2012

Good morning everyone.

Before I begin, I would like to express my humble appreciation for your flexibility and understanding with the venue change.

With the passion and commitment of those present today, I have no doubt of the high success of today's event, wherever it takes place.

Your Excellency David Choquehuanca Céspedes, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bolivia,
Your Excellency Sanja Štiglic, Permanent Representative of Slovenia to the United Nations,
Assistant Secretary-General Thomas Stelzer,
Assistant Secretary-General Ivan Šimonović,
Mr. Roberto Borrero
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

My sincere thanks go to the United Nations Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for convening this event.

I would also like to thank the Permanent Indigenous Forum for their invitation to be here today.

We join together to mark the 5th Anniversary of the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Five years on, I would like to welcome back to UN Headquarters the individuals and groups who contributed to this historic event.

The adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was the fruit of one of the longest and most complex standard-setting processes the United Nations ever embarked on.

I would therefore take this opportunity to commend the dedication and efforts of each of you who participated in bringing forth this Declaration.

Thanks to you, humankind made a major step towards the realization of a just and equitable world, one that is founded on principles of equality, justice and respect for diversity.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was a landmark in defending the individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples.

The rights enshrined in the Declaration constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples.

The Declaration has inspired many positive changes in guaranteeing and protecting indigenous peoples' rights.

In some countries, we have seen:

The creation of specialized institutions;

The amendment of legislation and constitutions;

The implementation of new policies and programmes;

Judgments delivered by tribunals based on the Declaration;

And trainings on indigenous peoples rights, among many other activities.

Yet, we know that more must be done.

A common concern of indigenous peoples is that governments need to involve and consult them when making decisions that affect them.

To address this concern, the UN Declaration clarifies international standards on the right to participate in decision-making on matters which affect their lives.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Access to financial and technical assistance from States and through international cooperation, is critical to promoting and protecting the human rights of indigenous peoples, in accordance with the UN Declaration.

To facilitate this assistance, a number of mechanisms are in place.

These include the United Nations Voluntary Fund for indigenous populations; and the Trust Fund for the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples; as well as other Trust Funds by various United Nations agencies.

The General Assembly has encouraged governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, private institutions and individuals, to continue to contribute to these Funds.

I would add my voice to this call.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you might be aware, by its resolution 65/198, the UN General Assembly decided to organize a high level plenary meeting of the General Assembly, to be known as the "World Conference on Indigenous Peoples".

The Assembly decided to hold this conference in 2014.

The World Conference will be an opportunity to share perspectives and best practices on the realization of the rights of indigenous peoples, with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for discussions.

I am of the view that the preparation process for the World Conference should be conducted through partnership between Member States and indigenous peoples.

I am aware that indigenous peoples, through regional and global processes, have established a global coordinating group for the World Conference.

To conduct inclusive informal consultations on my behalf, I have designated His Excellency Luis Alfonso de Alba, Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations, and Mr. John Henriksen, International Representative of the Sami Parliament of Norway, as facilitators in this process.

I thank both Ambassadors for taking on this important role.

I will also continue to monitor the consultations, in order to ensure progress during my presidency regarding the organization of the World Conference.

In closing, I would invite Governments, the UN system, indigenous peoples organizations, and other stakeholders, including the media, to undertake activities that mark the fifth anniversary of the Declaration.

In doing so, you will carry the torch of this remarkable Declaration, and help to make its noble objectives a reality for indigenous peoples worldwide.

Thank you.