

## Remarks at the opening of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples

**Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, UN Headquarters, 22 September 2014**

Thank you for coming to the United Nations for this this historic, first-ever World Conference on Indigenous Peoples!

I am going to greet you in a few indigenous languages. I am sorry that I cannot speak in every language represented here. But please consider this my way of welcoming each of you:

Takahi [TAINO – LATIN AMERICA],  
Aweh [SOUTH AFRICA],  
Kia Ora [NEW ZEALAND],  
Buorre beaivvi [SAAMI – NORWAY & SWEDEN],  
Hau [LAKOTA – NORTH AMERICA],  
Kopisanangani [DUSUN-SABAH, MALAYSIA],

This is the most important week of the year at the United Nations. And this Conference is one of our most important events because connects so much of our most critical work.

Indigenous peoples are concerned about issues that top the global agenda. They are deeply connected to Mother Earth – whose future is at the heart of the Climate Summit opening tomorrow.

Indigenous peoples are central to our discourse of human rights and global development. Your deliberations and decisions will reverberate across the international community with concrete effects in the lives of indigenous people. The success of this Conference is integral to progress for all humanity.

Damas y caballeros,

Con el fin de prepararme para esta Conferencia, me reuní con muchos líderes indígenas para oír lo que les preocupaba y aprender de sus experiencias.

En junio fui a Bolivia, país que ha logrado grandes progresos en lo que se refiere a los derechos de los pueblos indígenas. El Presidente Morales impulsó esta importante Conferencia de manera decisiva.

La gente de El Torno fue muy cálida y generosa. Quedé impresionado por su rica cultura.

Ellos me enseñaron más acerca de la relación de respeto entre los pueblos indígenas y la naturaleza. Esto podría resumirse en la expresión que adopté de Bolivia: “El buen vivir”, que significa vivir bien pero de manera sencilla.

Señores y señoras,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

In July, I held talks with indigenous leaders in Costa Rica. The former Permanent Representative of Costa Rica, Ambassador Eduardo Uribarri, also actively promoted this Conference.

We had a meaningful, open discussion. I listened closely to what the indigenous leaders had to say. They were worried about land, resources and their rights. I repeated my pledge to address the

exclusion and marginalization facing many indigenous peoples around the world.

Earlier this month, I was in New Zealand, where I travelled to Tuapō to spend a day with Māori leaders. They were using their great respect for nature to build prosperity. I was impressed by their multimillion-dollar horticulture, waste management and energy production companies. I will never forget how every bit of waste is fed to worms that create very rich organic fertilizer. This is sustainability in action. It showed how much the world can learn from indigenous peoples.

I will continue visiting indigenous communities and hearing from your leaders. And you will always have a home at the United Nations.

I am proud that the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples during my first year in office. That set minimum standards for the survival, dignity and wellbeing of indigenous peoples.

More and more countries are reflecting these principles in their laws and constitutions. UN agencies have also developed specific policies to guide our work for indigenous peoples. And we are joining forces with indigenous peoples to reach our common goals.

I am pleased to welcome representatives of our leading experts: the Permanent Forum, the Special Rapporteur and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

I am sure they would agree that it is important to get pledges from governments – but it is even more important to see actions.

That is why I am encouraged that the Conference Outcome Document contains action-oriented commitments to bridge the gap between promises and results. I thank all the indigenous peoples and governments that cooperated in good faith to produce this draft. And I expect Member States to meet their commitments, including by carrying out national action plans to realize our shared vision.

I welcome the Outcome Document's direct requests to me. I will also consult the rest of the UN system on the way forward. We will work closely with all of you and the Member States.

The Outcome Document also requests that I develop concrete proposals to enable indigenous peoples and their institutions to more directly participate in our UN activities. This is critical for indigenous communities – and for our world.

The Outcome Document also asks me to appoint a high-level official on indigenous peoples. I will give this my most serious consideration.

The United Nations will do everything possible to support indigenous peoples – and we count on your engagement in our global drive for a more sustainable future.

I began with greetings in a few indigenous languages. I know there are thousands of others. Some of them are in danger of extinction.

I am proud that the Declaration has been translated beyond the UN's six official languages into 50 other languages. I hope we can add many more to the long list.

At the same time, I count on you to speak with one voice.

A longtime indigenous activist and former member of the Permanent Forum, Tonya Gonnella Frichner, once said, “Indigenous peoples all [speak many] different languages but in our meetings, we are speaking one language. Our relationship to Mother Earth is identical.”

Please join your voices in a harmonious chorus to secure your rights and protect our planet.

The United Nations stands with you in this struggle.

Thank you.