



**SOUTH AFRICAN PERMANENT MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND
OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS**

**8TH SESSION OF THE EXPERT MECHANISM ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS
PEOPLES**

UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

**23 JULY 2015
PALAIS DES NATIONS**

Check against delivery

Mr Chairperson,

South Africa supports the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and its objectives, which is in line with the provisions of the South African Constitution. We believe that in order to give tangible and legal protection to their rights, the time is opportune for the system to initiate a legally binding instrument in this regard.

The South African Constitution forms the basis for restoration of the dignity, integrity and the self-worth of our people, including Indigenous Peoples as well as uniting our diverse cultural communities to be able to realize the ideal of "unity in diversity".

In implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, South Africa is informed by the imperative need to implement policies and legislation aimed at progressively addressing the inequalities created by the past colonial and apartheid eras, to ensure a better life for all South Africans. This approach affirms the equality and human dignity of all South Africans, based on the principle of non-discrimination and equality.

Following the adoption of the Declaration, the Department of Traditional Affairs was established in 2009 to honour and respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples, including their right to practice their cultures, religions and languages. The Department deals exclusively with indigenous/traditional affairs underpinned by 5 pillars, namely, (a) indigenous leadership; (b) governance; (c) culture; (d) administration of justice; and (e) socio-cultural and economic development.

Mr Chairperson,

The three United Nations bodies have different roles and complement each other to ensure improved recognition and respect for the rights of Indigenous Peoples. The golden thread that runs through these different mandates is the Declaration that inspires Indigenous Peoples throughout the world.

Finally Mr Chairperson, we believe the following practical thrusts are important in the discourse on the implementation of the Declaration:

- (a) Strengthening governance of indigenous institutions and peoples;
- (b) Promotion and protection of the cultures and heritages of Indigenous Peoples;
- (c) Improving the capacity and capability of the leadership of Indigenous Peoples;
and
- (d) A Right to Development based approach and people centred development.

I thank you.