

**Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

**International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples**

**Celebrating the strengths of indigenous peoples and their culture**

This year we celebrate the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples in a time of great uncertainty and upheaval. Much will be said on this day about the impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous peoples. Those who are among the most vulnerable communities in the world constituting of over 476 million Indigenous people living in 90 countries. For many of our Indigenous brothers and sisters the impact of Coronavirus is acute.

We acknowledge Indigenous communities globally in their fight to protect their elders and populations from the ravages of the virus. Moreover, some indigenous communities already under immense stress have to contend with governments taking advantage of the COVID-19 crisis to further diminish and wind back Indigenous peoples’ rights and freedoms. This is alarming and as we move towards treatment and the development of a vaccine, much work will need to be done within the communities, nationally, and internationally, to assist Indigenous peoples in their recovery and to understand the impact on their rights and health.

As a group of experts with the mandate to assist Member States in achieving the goals of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), we take the opportunity of this Day to recognise the strengths of Indigenous culture, especially the strength of our Indigenous communities and the global fellowship that connects all Indigenous peoples through the United Nations. The announcement of the international day in 1994 is testament to the effective lobbying by Indigenous peoples of the UN General Assembly to dedicate an International Day to recognise Indigenous peoples and their rights.

In fact, the date of the International day was chosen to recognise the date of the first meeting of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (UNWGIP). Established in 1982, the UNWGIP was tasked with following up on “the Cobo” review, which set out the many dimensions of Indigenous peoples rights. The UNWGIP led to an international year of Indigenous peoples, the establishment of the position of Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. It was also the genesis of the UNDRIP, a declaration resulting from over a decade of hard work and diplomacy of Indigenous activists and human rights defenders. On this day, we remember and honour their vision, perseverance and hard work.

Together with the Voluntary Fund, which supports Indigenous participation at the UN, the Permanent Forum and the Special Rapporteur, the Expert Mechanism continues the legacy of the UNWGIP. Today, this expert body advances the work that the UNWGIP began through: conducting studies to advance the promotion and protection of indigenous peoples’ rights, such as land rights and migration; clarifying the interpretation of key rights in the UNDRIP, such as the right to self-determination and free, prior and informed consent; and examining good practices and challenges in a broad array of areas pertaining to the rights of indigenous peoples. We have also provided expert advice to UN member States such as New Zealand and Finland, as well as Mexico City. We applaud those States who have recognised the UNDRIP in legislation or policy, implemented action plans or have taken other concrete measures to implement the UNDRIP.

In celebrating this day, we seek to acknowledge the hardships being experienced under COVID-19 while at the same time recognising the extraordinary strength and resilience of Indigenous peoples and their cultures.

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