



*For immediate release
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UN launches first global partnership to advance rights of indigenous peoples

NEW YORK – 20 May 2011 – The first global UN inter-agency initiative to promote and protect the rights of indigenous peoples was launched today on the occasion of the 10th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

The initiative, called the United Nations-Indigenous Peoples' Partnership (UNIPP), is a commitment to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and calls for its full realization through the mobilization of financial cooperation and technical assistance.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the initiative and urged all countries "to support this new initiative so that it can fulfill its potential to turn the Declaration's principles into reality." He noted that "indigenous people suffered centuries of oppression, and continue to lose their lands, their languages and their resources at an alarming rate.

"Despite these obstacles" he said, "indigenous people make an enormous contribution to our world, including through their spiritual relationship with the earth. By helping indigenous peoples regain their rights, we will also protect our shared environment for the benefit of all."

The aim of the UNIPP is to secure the rights of indigenous peoples, strengthen their institutions and ability to fully participate in governance and policy processes at the local and national levels, including conflict prevention in regard to ancestral land and use of natural resources. Many indigenous communities are witness to exploitation of these lands and resources by extractive industries – in many cases without regard to their rights.

The Chair of the United Nations Permanent Forum, Mirna Cunningham, said the partnership was "an important step in the efforts of indigenous peoples everywhere to fully realize their human rights. We look forward to our continued work with the UN so that the voiceless will be heard and that we can bring about dignity and respect for the diversity of our cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations."

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) and ILO's Indigenous and Tribal People's Convention (No. 169) adopted in 1989, are widely recognized as the key international instruments for promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples.

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There are more than 370 million indigenous peoples in some 90 countries accounting for 15 percent of the world's poor and one-third of the 900 million people living in extreme poverty. Indigenous people also tend to experience low levels of education, increased health problems, higher crime rates and human rights abuses.

Globally, indigenous children are less likely than other children to be in school and more likely to drop out of school. Indigenous girls are at even greater risk of being excluded from school. Furthermore, indigenous children often face a lifetime of discrimination and exclusion, deepening their disadvantages and perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

The newly launched UNIPP will help address these problems and other social, economic and political issues by working with governments and indigenous peoples' organization through various means including training, promotion of dialogue, the establishment of consultative processes, legislative review and reform, as well as conflict prevention.

UNIPP brings together the experience and expertise of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Over generations, indigenous peoples have developed highly specialized knowledge, livelihood strategies, occupations and cultures, which are closely linked to lands, territories and natural resources. In the context of today's crisis, indigenous knowledge is critical to the search for new solutions, which link human development, human rights, peace and environmental sustainability.

Indigenous peoples are in a unique position to contribute to addressing the most pressing environmental and social challenges of our time. Their partnership is an essential requirement, and something which UNIPP seeks to promote.

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