

UNITED NATIONS



OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



OHCHR
STATEMENT

Message of Louise Arbour, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, on the occasion of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples

Geneva, 7 August 2007: - As we celebrate the International Day of the World's Indigenous People on 9 August this year, the focus of attention for many of these most marginalized peoples will be the decision that is due to be taken in the next days by the United Nations General Assembly in relation to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Declaration establishes international human rights standards for the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples and was adopted in June 2006 by the Human Rights Council, the principal human rights intergovernmental body of the United Nations. It has been 20 years in the making. Its contents are drawn from the experiences of thousands of indigenous representatives who have shared their anguish and their hopes.

As we stand at the brink of this historic decision by the General Assembly, it is the time to call upon member states of the United Nations to join as one and adopt the Declaration and thereby establish a universal framework for indigenous peoples' rights, social justice and reconciliation.

The adoption of the Declaration by the Human Rights Council should be seen as providing impetus for renewed efforts by the international community to address the pressing concerns of the world's 370 million indigenous people, including perhaps the most urgent issue of all: poverty and marginalization.

World leaders committed themselves in the year 2000 to realizing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and in particular reducing poverty by half, by the year 2015. There has been progress towards meeting these commitments but as we reach the mid-point for the realization of these goals, there is increasing evidence that indigenous peoples are largely overlooked in these global efforts. They remain among the poorest of the poor, with little reference to them in the reports on implementation of the MDGs.

While the International Day of the World's Indigenous People is a celebration of humankind's diversity and richness, it needs also to serve as a reminder of the continuing exclusion indigenous peoples face. Halfway to the 2015 deadline for the MDGs, and with the impending adoption of the Declaration by the General Assembly,

it is time to call upon States and the international community to reach out to indigenous peoples and ensure that they also benefit from the pledge made by Heads of State at the turn of the millennium.