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## **UN urges greater appreciation of indigenous culture and creativity**



A Cakchiquel family in the hamlet of Patzutzun, Guatemala

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[Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon today urged the world to recognize the right of indigenous peoples to control their intellectual property, saying they needed help to protect, develop and receive fair compensation for their cultural heritage and traditional knowledge.

“Indigenous peoples face many challenges in maintaining their identity, traditions and customs, and their cultural contributions are at times exploited and commercialized, with little or no

recognition,” Mr. Ban said in a [message](#) to mark the [International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples](#).

“I encourage all Member States to take concrete steps to address the challenges facing indigenous peoples – including marginalization, extreme poverty and loss of lands, territories and resources. Countries should also commit to ending the grave human rights abuses that indigenous peoples encounter in many parts of the world,” he said.

He noted that there were 5,000 distinct groups of indigenous peoples in some 90 countries, who make up more than five per cent of the world's population – some 370 million people in total. They are custodians of valuable and often fast-disappearing cultural heritage, the Secretary-General said.

“We see their creativity and innovations in the arts, literature and the sciences,” said Mr. Ban, noting that those contributions were highlighted by the theme of this year's observance of the Day, which is “Indigenous designs: Celebrating stories and cultures, crafting our own future.”

“As we look forward to the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in 2014, I urge all Member States to work in full partnership with indigenous people to identify practical ideas and proposals for action at this important gathering,” he said, calling for concerted efforts to strengthen their rights and support their aspirations.

In her [statement](#) to mark the Day, Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, noted that indigenous peoples around the world have lost, or are under imminent threat of losing, their ancestral lands, territories and natural resources as a result of unfair exploitation for the sake of “development.”

She said natural resource extraction projects such as mining are land-intensive and water-intensive and often directly affect the collective rights of indigenous peoples to their lands and territories.

“All too often we see conflict between corporations, indigenous peoples and the State over development projects which are initiated without consultation or consent of the very people who are dispossessed of their land,” said Ms. Pillay.

“The right to development is a human right for all, and indigenous peoples have the right to define and determine their own development. On this International Day of the World's Indigenous People, let us ensure that development for some is not to the detriment of the human rights of others,” she said.

Achim Steiner, the Executive Director of the UN Environmental Programme ([UNEP](#)), said the agency was partnering with indigenous peoples in various places – including the Arctic, Africa and so-called small island developing States – to highlight the fact that more than two-thirds of the Earth's biological resources are also the traditional territories of most indigenous peoples.

The Director of the UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), Irina Bokova, said indigenous peoples hold some of the solutions to global challenges. They speak the

majority of humanity's languages and have crafted livelihoods that combine cultural and biological diversity. “They have developed knowledge systems with unique insight to sustainable development,” she said.

Anthony Lake, the Executive Director of the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)), called for concerted efforts to overcome barriers that prevent the children of indigenous communities from access to services they need to survive and thrive. He pointed out that indigenous children have lower school enrolment rates, higher drop-out rates and lower educational attainment than non-indigenous children.

The UN World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) reaffirmed its commitment to working with indigenous peoples and other partners to advancing those communities' right to health, while Michelle Bachelet, the Executive Director of UN Women, stressed the need to end gender-based violence and improve the economic status of all women, including the most marginalized in indigenous communities.

Francis Gurry, the Director-General of UN World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), in his message said traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions hold potential economic value which can form the basis for community enterprises and cultural industries and contribute to economic development and poverty reduction.

The Executive Secretary of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity,

Ahmed Djoghlaif, and Jan McAlpine, the Director of the UN Forum on Forests Secretariat, also highlighted the important role that indigenous communities play in global conservation efforts.

Patricia Velasquez, an indigenous model and actress from Venezuela, will today address a special event at UN Headquarters via video message, highlighting the work of her own Wayuu Taya Foundation to help improve the lives of Latin American indigenous communities, while maintaining and respecting their traditions, culture and beliefs.

“In every indigenous design there is a story representing the heritage, traditions and the spirituality of an individual or a community. Protecting these works, the artists who create them and the knowledge behind them from misuse or exploitation is essential to preserving indigenous cultures.

“At Wayuu Taya we have seen how indigenous crafts can be developed into a sustainable business that celebrates as well as preserves the traditions of the community. The full participation of indigenous peoples in decisions that affect them and their communities is key,” said Ms. Velasquez.

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