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## UN forum on indigenous issues opens with Ban calling for respect for values



Delegates at the ninth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

19 April 2010 – The annual United Nations forum on indigenous issues opened today with a call from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for Member States to promote development while respecting the values and traditions of indigenous peoples.

“The loss of irreplaceable cultural practices and means of artistic expression makes us all poorer, wherever our roots may lie,” Mr. Ban **told** the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York. This year’s theme at the forum is “Development with Culture and Identity.”

“I call on all governments, indigenous peoples, the UN system and all other partners to ensure that the vision behind the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples becomes a reality for all,” the Secretary-General added.

**Indigenous cultures, languages and ways of life are under constant threat from climate change, armed conflict, lack of educational opportunities and discrimination**

Mr. Ban’s call comes as New Zealand announced today that it will reverse its decision and support the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples.

New Zealand was one of four countries – the others being Australia, Canada and the United States – that voted against the Declaration in 2007. Australia reversed its decision last year.

The landmark document outlines the rights of the world's estimated 370 million indigenous people and outlaws discrimination against them.

A non-binding text, the declaration sets out the individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples, as well as their rights to culture, identity, language, employment, health, education and other issues.

Some 2,000 indigenous representatives are estimated to take part in the two-week meeting, which include Member States, UN agencies and civil society groups.

During the forum, participants will focus on Articles 3 and 32 of the declaration, which guarantee indigenous peoples full and effective participation in development processes, including thorough consultation in the establishment of development programs and policies.

The agenda also includes topics related to indigenous peoples of North America and the relationship between indigenous peoples and forests.

The side events during the forum include a special screening of the film *Avatar* and an exhibit in the UN Headquarters lobby entitled "Indigenous Peoples and Self-Determination."

"Indigenous cultures, languages and ways of life are under constant threat from climate change, armed conflict, lack of educational opportunities and discrimination," the Secretary-General highlighted in today's speech.

"Elsewhere, your cultures are being distorted, commodified, and used to generate profits which do not benefit indigenous people, and can even lead to harm."

Indigenous peoples make up five per cent of the world's population, but some 33 per cent of the world's poor, according to *State of the World's Indigenous Peoples*, released in January and the first UN report of its kind.

Of the some 7,000 languages being spoken today, more than 4,000 are spoken by indigenous peoples. Language specialists predict that up to 90 per cent of the world's languages are likely to become extinct or threatened with extinction by the end of the century, eroding "an essential component of a group's identity," the Secretary-General said.

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**UN forum on indigenous issues to focus on rights in development processes**