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## UN launches new initiative to promote rights of world's indigenous peoples



Participants of the fourth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at UN Headquarters in May 2005

20 May 2011 –

Four United Nations entities today launched a new initiative to promote and protect the rights of indigenous peoples, aiming to strengthen their institutions and ability to fully participate in governance and policy processes at the local and national levels.

The initiative, to be known as the UN Indigenous Peoples' Partnership (UNIPP), was launched on the sidelines of the 10th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues under way at UN Headquarters.

It draws experience and expertise from the UN International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)), UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)), UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) and the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) in an effort to implement the provisions of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

[Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon welcomed the initiative and urged all countries to support it “so that it can fulfil 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, 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.”

Through the UNIPP partnership, the UN agencies also intend to prevent conflict with regard to ancestral land and use of natural resources. Many indigenous communities have witnessed the exploitation of those lands and resources by extractive industries – in many cases without regard to their rights.

The chairperson of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 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,” she added.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and ILO’s Indigenous and Tribal People’s Convention are widely recognized as the key international instruments for promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples.

There are more than 370 million indigenous peoples in some 90 countries accounting, for 15 per cent 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.

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.

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