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International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples
9 August 2006

Today marks the 12th commemoration of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

This year's commemoration is of particular significance in light of the recent adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the Human Rights Council on 29 June 2006. Once adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, the Declaration and ILO Convention 169 concerning indigenous and tribal peoples will constitute the principal international documents to protect and ensure indigenous rights.

The Declaration recognises indigenous peoples' rights to the land and natural resources they have traditionally owned, occupied or used, and obliges States to protect and give legal recognition to these lands and resources. Similarly, ILO Convention 169 calls upon governments to identify land indigenous peoples have traditionally occupied, and to guarantee effective protection of their rights of ownership and possession.

The 2001 Land Law of Cambodia recognises the right of indigenous communities to collective ownership of their lands. However, the legislation to register collective title and to protect indigenous lands pending registration is yet to be adopted.

As noted by successive Special Representatives of the Secretary-General for human rights in Cambodia, indigenous peoples are increasingly vulnerable to land confiscation and the alienation of their land. There is genuine concern that by the time implementing legislation is in place, little land will remain for collective titling. This legislation and interim measures to protect land eligible for indigenous ownership are urgently needed.

Where indigenous land and resources have already been confiscated, alienated or occupied without free, prior and informed consent, measures are also required to provide redress. This right to redress is recognised in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which calls for restitution of the land and resources in question, or the allocation of land and resources of equal quality, size and status.

Today, the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, allows us to take stock of progress to date, and enables Cambodia to renew its commitment to develop and implement sound national policies that respect the identity, culture and way of life of its indigenous peoples and advance the enjoyment of their human rights. OHCHR in Cambodia looks forward to working with the Government, non-governmental organisations, other international agencies and Cambodia's indigenous peoples to this end.