



International Day of the World's Indigenous People

Statement by Acting UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Kyung-wha Kang, and S. James Anaya, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people

Geneva: - This year's International Day of the World's Indigenous People, celebrated on 9 August, is the first to take place following the landmark adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the General Assembly in September 2007.

The Declaration, which was the culmination of more than two decades of tireless campaigning by indigenous peoples – the drafting was started in 1985 – marked a significant development in the protection of their human rights.

The Declaration, approved by an overwhelming majority of UN Member States, lays down minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the world's estimated 5,000 indigenous groups (comprising as many as 370 million individuals). It seeks to address the historical injustices they have faced by re-affirming their right to be different, and to live peacefully on their own lands. It also represents a significant contribution to the guiding principles of justice and dignity championed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which celebrates its 60th anniversary this year.

However, the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – important though it is – will not in itself change the everyday lives of the men, women and children whose rights it champions. For this we need the political commitment of states, international cooperation, and the support and good will of the public at large, to create and implement a range of intensely practical programmes, designed and undertaken in consultation with indigenous peoples themselves.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – the principal UN body responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights – and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, are committed to working together towards the realization of the rights contained in the Declaration, so that increasing numbers of the world's indigenous peoples can truly live in dignity and peace.

For more information, please visit:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/indigenous/intday2008.htm>

ENDS