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Secretary-General

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WORLD MUST ACT TO PROTECT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS, STRENGTHEN LANGUAGES,

LIVELIHOODS, CULTURES, SAYS SECRETARY-GENERAL ON INTERNATIONAL DAY

Following is UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's message on the International Day of the World's Indigenous People, observed 9 August:

On this International Day of the World's Indigenous People, we rejoice in the richness of indigenous cultures and the special contributions they make to the human family. We also recall the tremendous challenges which so many indigenous peoples face, ranging from unacceptable levels of poverty and disease to dispossession, discrimination and denial of basic human rights.

Launched in 1995, the first International Decade of the World's Indigenous People helped to make the voices of indigenous peoples heard more clearly around the world, and to focus greater attention on indigenous issues. This year, we enter a Second Decade, and as we do so, let us remember that dialogue alone is not enough. Our focus must be on action to protect the rights of indigenous peoples and improve their situations with respect to their lands, their languages, their livelihoods, and their cultures.

The recent Fourth Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues focussed with renewed energy on the importance of indigenous peoples achieving the Millennium Development Goals, particularly those of eradicating extreme poverty and ensuring primary education for all. The Forum stressed the need for a human rights-based approach to poverty reduction and the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in all stages of programmes.

It also recommended bilingual and intercultural education for indigenous children. The Forum sent an important message to next month's World Summit in New York that the partnership and trust built between indigenous peoples and the United Nations needs to translate into concrete action at the regional, national and local levels that empower indigenous peoples and strengthen their identities, languages, cultures, and traditional knowledge.

For indigenous peoples as for all others, lasting progress in development is intimately connected to progress in peace and security and in human rights. The World Summit will consider these three great objectives in a comprehensive way. As we look to the Summit, let us resolve to broaden the circle of solidarity for indigenous peoples everywhere, and to work with them to make sure that they enjoy the development, peace and security, and human rights that too many have been denied for too long.

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