

## PRESS RELEASE

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### UN SECRETARY-GENERAL'S MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE 10 August 2009

ISLAMABAD, 07 August 2009 (UN Information Centre) – *In 1994, the General Assembly decided that the International Day of the World's Indigenous People shall be observed on 9 August every year during the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (Resolution 49/214 of 23 December). The date marks the day of the first meeting, in 1982, of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations of the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights:*

“The world’s indigenous peoples – 370 million in 70 countries -- are the custodians of some of the most biologically diverse areas on earth. They speak a majority of the world’s languages, and their traditional knowledge, cultural diversity and sustainable ways of life make an invaluable contribution to the world’s common heritage.

The adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the General Assembly in 2007 was a landmark in the struggle of indigenous peoples for justice, equal rights and development. There have also been recent welcome steps at the national level; some governments have apologized to indigenous peoples for past injustices, and others have advanced legislative and constitutional reforms.

Still, indigenous peoples remain some of the most marginalized populations, suffering disproportionately from poverty and inadequate access to education. Many face discrimination and racism on a daily basis. All too often, their languages face strictures or are threatened with extinction, while their territories are sacrificed for mining and deforestation.

Indigenous peoples also tend to suffer from the low standards of health associated with poverty, malnutrition, environmental contamination and inadequate healthcare. With that in mind, this year’s observance of the International Day focuses on the threat of HIV/AIDS. It is essential that indigenous peoples have access to the information and infrastructure necessary for detection, treatment and protection.

Insufficient progress in health, in particular, points to a persistent and profound gap in many countries between the formal recognition of indigenous peoples’ rights and the actual situation on the ground. On this International Day, I call on Governments and civil society to act with urgency and determination to close this implementation gap, in full partnership with indigenous peoples.”