

**CHAIR**

**ADDRESS AT THE OPENING OF THE EIGHTEENTH SESSION OF THE  
PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES**

**New York, 22 April 2019**

*Your Excellency Maria Fernanda Espinosa*, President of the 73rd session of the General Assembly;

*Your Excellency Valentin Ribakov*, Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council ;

*Mr. Stefan Schweinfest*, representative of the Under Secretary-General of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs;

*Ms. Cristina Pasca Palmer*, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity,

Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,

Distinguished Elders and Delegates, Indigenous sisters and brothers,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you here today at this eighteenth session of the Permanent Forum.

Let me pay my respects to the Onondaga Nation and Peoples, in particular Tadodaho Sid Hill, the traditional Chief of the Onondaga Nation, the original inhabitants of this land and to thank them for having us here again.

I would like to thank the outgoing Chair, Mariam Wallet Aboubakrine, who has guided our work so ably for the past two years?, and I thank my colleagues of the Permanent Forum for placing their trust in me to chair this 18<sup>th</sup> session. I count on your valuable support, so the Forum can continue contributing to improving the wellbeing and lives of indigenous peoples around the world. I promise to work hard in advancing that endeavor .

Excellencies and Friends,

The special theme of this year's Forum, "Indigenous Peoples' Traditional Knowledge: Generation, transmission and protection" is an opportunity for us to share the innovations and practices we have developed in our communities over centuries and millennia. Through our stories, songs, dances, carvings, paintings and performances we transmit knowledge between generations. It is at the core of our identity, heritage and livelihood and must, therefore, be protected.

Global histories of colonialism, exploitation and dispossession has and continues to undermine and undervalue our traditional knowledge. We need to ensure that our educational practices, languages, environmental conservation and management is acknowledged and respected globally, not only by governments, but by all peoples. Understanding the past and seeking reconciliation is an important part of these efforts. In that vein, we are currently observing the International Year of Indigenous languages, a chance to celebrate our traditional languages, but also to take action to preserve them and save those on the verge of extinction.

Looking towards the current and future work of the Forum I would like to share my thoughts on key areas where I believe we can build on the discussions, recommendations and work we have carried out to date.

The autonomy and self-determination of indigenous peoples is enshrined in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We continue to strive to revive and to strengthen our customs and traditions to pursue our own economic, social and political development. Autonomy and self-determination are at the core of all other issues, past and present, we discuss at the Forum.

For instance, the link between self-determination and participation - the importance of fully participating and being represented in international, regional and national legal negotiations, processes and agreements that impact our everyday lives, such as on climate change, use and care of lands and waters. Indigenous peoples have much to contribute.

We are seeing the strong and growing engagement of indigenous peoples in the intergovernmental arena, for instance, through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change with the establishment of the local communities and indigenous peoples platform, through the Indigenous Peoples Major Group at the High-level Political Forum and in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, consultations with the Office of the President of the General Assembly on ways to enhance the participation of indigenous peoples at the United Nations, again take place during the current session. With input from these consultations, the General Assembly will take this item up on its agenda in its session in 2020.

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples reaffirms the collective right of indigenous peoples to a life of freedom, peace and security as distinct peoples. However, there are ever-growing tensions and rising levels of violence surrounding the use of traditional indigenous lands. This can be due to the negative effects of climate change and the movement of

peoples, environmental mismanagement, drug trafficking and production activities and economic ventures such as those of extractive industries. This feeds the increased attacks against human rights defenders and particularly violence against women highlighted by the Special Rapporteur in her report last year to the Human Rights Council and General Assembly.

The 2030 Agenda has served to highlight the linkages between peace and security, environmental, economic and social issues. It is now increasingly recognized, for instance, that land use disputes are leading to growing civil unrest and rising violence that are challenging the peace and security of many countries and sub-regions. Through ECOSOC and the lens of the 2030 Agenda, the Permanent Forum and its Members have been able to present the concerns of indigenous peoples on peace and security issues, and I see a growing need for us to give more attention to these issues.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my co-members of the Permanent Forum for their continuing commitment and contribution to achieve the Forum's mandate, and for the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which provides us with the framework to guide and inspire our work.

I thank the representatives of indigenous peoples' organizations and nations, Member States, the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues and our partners and colleagues who have made significant efforts to realize the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

I also extend our appreciation to the team at the Indigenous Peoples and Development Branch - Secretariat of the Permanent Forum, Division for Inclusive Social Development, DESA, who work hard to prepare for the session.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the indigenous peoples of the world who tirelessly pursue their struggle for their rights and dignity, and their own visions and priorities for development. Many of you have traveled far from home to participate in this Session. Let us all work together to make this session meaningful for you and your peoples.

Thank you.