

MS. MARIAM WALLET ABOUBAKRINE

CHAIR

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

New York, 16 April 2018

Your Excellency Miroslav Lajčák, President of the 72nd session of the General Assembly;

Your Excellency Inga Rhonda King, Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council;

Your Excellency Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia;

Mr. Elliott Harris, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development and Chief Economist in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs;

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 seventeenth 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 my colleagues of the Permanent Forum for placing their trust in me to chair this session. I am humbled by this, and promise to do my best to carry out my duties. I count on your valuable support so the Forum can contribute significantly to improving the wellbeing and lives of indigenous peoples around the world.

On behalf of my colleagues, I extend our sincere thanks to the Government of Plurinational State of Bolivia for graciously hosting our pre-session meeting. This gave us the space to prepare for this session and meet with indigenous peoples' organizations, the United Nations country team and Government representatives. Bolivia is unique in having adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into national law - an example that other countries may wish to follow. Thank you for having us in your lovely country.

Excellencies and Friends,

The special theme of the Forum's session this year - Indigenous Peoples' Collective Rights to Lands, Territories and Resources - is in recognition of the fundamental importance of these rights to indigenous peoples. Our lands and resources are the sources of our spiritual, cultural and collective identities and constitute the basis of our economic livelihoods.

Collective rights to lands, territories and resources are key demands of the international indigenous peoples' movement and of indigenous peoples and organizations everywhere. These rights are firmly guaranteed by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including within the framework of our right to self-determination.

Indigenous peoples' tradition of collective rights to lands, territories and resources is part of our history and heritage. This is often in contrast with dominant models of individual

ownership, privatization and development. There is growing recognition that advancing indigenous peoples' rights to lands and resources not only contributes to their well-being but also to the greater good of the world by tackling problems such as climate change and loss of biodiversity. Studies show that securing rights of indigenous peoples to forests often leads to low deforestation that mitigates climate change at low costs. And that indigenous peoples managed lands host 80% of the remaining biodiversity of the Earth.

Unfortunately, only a few countries have recognized or made efforts to uphold indigenous peoples' collective rights to lands, territories and resources in line with the UN Declaration. Most countries are yet to recognize such rights – let alone implement them. Even in countries where those rights are recognized, enforcement of laws is weak or often lacking altogether, with contradictory laws affecting those rights. Necessary procedures such as demarcation and titling are not effectively undertaken and security of land and resource rights continues to be a problem.

We continue to hear of indigenous peoples' rights defenders and movements being targeted for raising their voices and protecting their rights against expropriation of their lands and extraction of their resources without their free, prior and informed consent. That often happens when States and non-State actors want their lands and resources for aggressive development projects or destructive business operations, in violation of national and international standards.

Our land and resources are our life – not mere commodities. Without our rights to our lands, territories and resources being recognized and protected, we are in danger of remaining behind in the global goals of sustainable development. At the same time, the world is also at

risk of losing out to challenges of climate change and environmental destruction. So, we should be reminded of this reality at this year's session.

Highlights of the Session

Let me now give you some highlights of this year's session.

This year, in response to the inputs and feedback received, we decided to initiate a change in our methods of work. The aim is to strike a strategic balance in providing space for indigenous peoples, Member States, UN entities and others to share good practices and challenges for implementing the UN Declaration, and formulating expert advice and policy recommendations from the Forum in this regard.

- The first week of the Forum will be all open plenary meetings with discussions on all agenda items. There will be no closed meetings.
- During the second week, members of the Forum will hold informal meetings with representatives of indigenous peoples, Member States and UN entities. The purpose of these meetings will be to draw on information presented during the first week, and channel this into policy recommendations that are strategic, focused and actionable.
- Simultaneous regional dialogues will also be held during the second week so that Permanent Forum Members can conduct focused discussions on issues relevant to those regions.
- This year, we will continue with the interactive dialogues with Member States, Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations System. It is our hope that these dialogues will provide an opportunity to identify challenges and opportunities that you may face, as

well as the progress in carrying out your commitment to strengthen indigenous peoples' rights. We look forward to this constructive dialogue so we can mutually support our work to promote respect for and full application of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Other highlights of this session include:

- There will be a discussion on the International Year of Indigenous Languages in 2019 as well as Indigenous women, children and youth.
- There will also be a discussion on 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, as an expert body of the Economic and Social Council, has a key role to play in ensuring that the rights and priorities of indigenous peoples are considered in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. We count on your support to better incorporate indigenous issues into the 2030 Development Agenda.
- We will also have a discussion to follow-up on the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples for an update on recent developments at the national and international level including on national action plans. In this context, the President of the General Assembly will conduct consultations on the participation of indigenous peoples' representatives and institutions in relevant United Nations meetings on issues affecting them tomorrow afternoon, Tuesday 17 April.
- I am also pleased to announce that for the second year, there will be an *Indigenous Media Zone* organized in coordination with Department of Public Information and indigenous media groups.

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 Secretariat of the Permanent Forum, Division for Social Policy and Development, DESA, who work tirelessly 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.