

3 October 2016

**71<sup>st</sup> session of the General Assembly**

**Open remarks by H.E. Peter Thomson,  
Consultations process on possible measures to enable the participation of  
Indigenous Peoples at relevant United Nations bodies**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Representatives of Indigenous Peoples,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

During this, the 71st session of the General Assembly, the General Assembly will convene a high-level event to mark the 10-year anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

It is an important milestone, and one that gives us the opportunity to reflect on our global progress towards the full and effective realization of indigenous people's rights.

While the growing global recognition of indigenous peoples' rights at domestic, regional, and international levels is to be acknowledged and welcomed, indigenous peoples continue to remain amongst our most marginalized and vulnerable. Despite constituting only five percent of the world's population, indigenous peoples account for 15 percent of the world's poorest. And many suffer the compounding effects of poverty, marginalization, discrimination, social, economic, and political exclusion, and a failure to have all of their human rights realized. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable.

For many indigenous peoples, the impacts of climate change, environmental degradation, rising sea levels, overfishing, and the cycle of decline of our oceans, have had a particularly deleterious impact, jeopardizing their food security and livelihoods, and driving them away from their traditional lands.

As we – the international community – now begin the hard task of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is imperative that we ensure that the development gains of our countries reach indigenous populations, and that the 17 SDGs are realized for all indigenous peoples.

An important part of achieving this is ensuring that indigenous peoples are able to participate in discussions on issues that affect their lives.

The decision last year, by the UN membership, to begin a consultation process on measures “to enable the participation of indigenous peoples' representatives and institutions in meetings of relevant UN bodies on issues affecting them”, could therefore not be more timely.

The purpose of today's informal briefing is, consequently, three-fold:

1. To assure delegations, indigenous peoples' representatives, and representatives from existing relevant UN mechanisms, of my commitment to overseeing the continuation of an open, transparent and inclusive process, that is able to reach a positive conclusion during the 71st session;
2. To thank the four Advisers who have helped to guide the General Assembly through the consultation process to date – namely, H.E. Mr. Kai Sauer, Permanent Representative of Finland; H.E. Ms. Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, Permanent Representative of Ghana; Dr. James Anaya; and Dr. Claire Winfield Ngamihi Charters – and to welcome their decision to continue on in this role during the 71st session, in order see the process move through to a successful conclusion; and
3. To provide an early opportunity for me and my Advisors to engage directly with Member States and indigenous peoples, and to ensure that the process towards a positive conclusion.

I am aware that both Member States and indigenous peoples made clear during the last General Assembly session the importance of having sufficient time: to undertake discussions domestically, regionally, and with local constituencies; to ensure existing relevant UN mechanisms are able to contribute to discussions; and to allow adequate time to complete and finalize the process.

We have heard this call loud and clear, and this is why we are launching the process today – and so soon after the start of the 71st session.

In terms of where the consultations are currently at, in line with General Assembly resolution 70/232, the former President of the General Assembly, circulated under the cover of a letter dated 8 July 2016, a compilation of views presented during the consultations process to date, including providing concrete recommendations on the way forward.

Consistent with resolution 70/232, it is now intended that this compilation will form the basis of a draft resolution which makes clear the procedural and institutional steps, and selection criteria, to enable the effective and meaningful participation of indigenous peoples' representative and institutions at the United Nations.

I will now invite the Advisers to brief you all on how they intend to conduct the next stage of the consultation process.

You will also have the opportunity to make interventions and ask questions, towards the end.

In conclusion, I encourage you all to engage actively in this process, to provide your full support and cooperation to the four Advisers, and to proceed with the commitment and momentum that this important issue deserves.

Thank you.