

9 August 2004

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,
on the Commemoration of the International Day of the World's
Indigenous Peoples**

It is a pleasure and honour for me, as President of the United Nations General Assembly, to greet the world's 370 million indigenous people on this special day the United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed as the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

The United Nations, and indeed the global community, has since the launch in December 1992 of the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples, progressively set the stage for action to ensure the rights of indigenous peoples in respect of their land, their language, their livelihood and their culture.

Issues of critical importance to indigenous peoples have been taken up at the highest level, through a decade of observances of the International Day, the ongoing initiatives of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, the proclamations in 1993 of the International Year of Indigenous Peoples and in 1994 of the International Decade of Indigenous Peoples and, more recently, the establishment in 2002 of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

I am pleased with the United Nations response to issues relating to indigenous peoples, particularly through the General Assembly and the specialized agencies, to promote international co-operation for the solution to problems indigenous people face in areas including human rights, the environment, development, education and health. These efforts help strengthen partnerships among Member States, indigenous people and the United Nations system that will provide a firm foundation for the progress of indigenous people, including through the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

We have made noteworthy progress since 1923, when Haudenosaunee Chief Deskaheh travelled to Geneva, determined to speak to the League of Nations to defend the rights of his people. Much, however, remains to be done in respect of the world's indigenous people, who live in over 70 countries. The Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples when it is concluded will, together with other general international legal instruments on human rights and fundamental freedoms, promote and protect the rights of indigenous peoples.

The Economic and Social Council has decided to recommend to the General Assembly that it declares a second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples when the current Decade ends this year. We must take advantage of the space such opportunities present to celebrate with indigenous peoples their myriad achievements and rich cultural diversity. At the same time, we must remain mindful of the challenges indigenous peoples continue to face and do

our part to ensure the preservation of their language, culture and religion. We can do so by pledging to uphold the values of tolerance, equality and individual freedoms for the benefit of all the world's indigenous peoples, and for all humankind.