

22 April 2009

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
at the Mother Earth Special Event**

President Evo Morales Ayma of the Plurinational State of Bolivia,
Excellencies,
Special guests Maude Barlow and Leonardo Boff,
United Nations and NGO Colleagues,
Brothers and Sisters All,

I am very pleased to join you today, one of our first warm days of spring, to celebrate our dear Mother Earth. Today we are highlighting a global effort to accelerate the growing awareness that we must enter a new phase of reconciliation and stewardship of our beleaguered planet. I think we can take heart in the widespread public understanding that people and the environment make up a single system -- vastly complex, but perilously vulnerable as well.

I am particularly happy that President Evo Morales Ayma decided to honour this special event with his presence. His election as President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia marked one of the most important political developments in the last 500 years of Latin American and Caribbean history. This is not only because of the fact that he is a representative of our first peoples, but because he has proven himself to be fully committed to the transmission of the great spiritual and moral values of our South and Central American and Caribbean ancestors – values that are greatly needed to help our world out of the neo-liberal quagmire of greed and social irresponsibility in which we find ourselves. You have already heard me say – more than once – that President Evo Morales Ayma is a true World Hero of Mother Earth. Mr. President, again, we are very honoured by your presence.

We are also very happy to have with us this afternoon, two very special guests. Leonardo Boff is perhaps the most widely recognized prophetic voice in Latin America today. I am very grateful to the Brazilians Government for making possible his presence among us for this historic special event. Maude Barlow is known and loved by all of us who recognize in her the world's leading authority on water. She promotes the same spiritual values as President Morales and Leonardo Boff – values that are indispensable for the survival of our species. Leonardo and Maude honour us with their presence.

It is appropriate that the movement to establish an International Mother Earth Day take place under the aegis of the General Assembly and, with all my heart, I support the proposed resolution. The world has been slow to respond to the emergencies posed by global warming and the reckless damage we are doing to our planet. But it must be said that the United Nations has been in the forefront of a global campaign to raise consciousness about the right of all humans to live a healthy life in harmony with nature.

Back in 1972, when environmentalists were considered a fringe group, we held the first UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. It marked the beginning of a global awareness of the interdependence that exists among human beings, other living species, and our planet. It also led to the establishment by the General Assembly of World Environment Day and the United Nations Environment Programme. Out of these decisions flowed the 1992 Earth Summit and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development which continues to guide international action. As well, the UN recognized 2008 as the year of the planet Earth.

Today the United Nations and so many dedicated non-governmental organizations that organized this event reaffirm our relationship to Mother Earth and our responsibility to coming generations to enhance our rights to a healthy environment and thereby promote the opportunities for peace and justice for all citizens. We call on Member States to cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystems.

In view of their different contributions to environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries must support an urgent shift to sustainable development. This is a responsibility that arises from the pressures their hyper-consuming societies place on the global environment. The technologies and financial resources they command can also assist developing countries in the transition to modes of production that are sustainable and assure the universal rights to such dwindling resources as clean air and water and healthy food.

I would also like to emphasize the role of indigenous peoples and their communities and other local communities in environmental management and development because of their traditional knowledge and practices. States should recognize and duly support their identity, culture and interests and enable the effective participation of indigenous peoples in the achievement of sustainable development.

Up to now, there has been no official Earth Day celebrated at the United Nations. We have World Environment Day during the week of 5 June with the aim to stimulate awareness of the environment and enhance political attention and public action. And people in many countries celebrate April 22nd as Earth Day since the 1970s.

But no occasion has existed until now that specifically honors the Earth as a whole and our place within it. The proposed International Mother Earth Day does not seek to replace these other events, but rather to reinforce and reinterpret them based on the evolving challenges we face.

All of us came from the Earth and to the Earth we will return. During our life here, the Earth sustains us and takes care of us, purifying the air we breathe and providing healthy natural foods for our sustenance. That is why I love to hear our Earth referred to as "Mother Earth". In Bolivia, they call her Pacha Mama and in Nicaragua, our ancestors referred to her as Tonantzin. The variations exist around the world according to the languages of indigenous peoples.

International Mother Earth Day promotes a view of the Earth as the entity that sustains all living things found in nature. Inclusiveness is at the heart of International Mother Earth Day; fostering shared

responsibilities to rebuild our troubled relationship with nature is a cause that is uniting people around the world.

Let us celebrate, with hope and determination, a new relationship between all humanity and Mother Earth.

Thank you.