

24 April 2009

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
at the Closing of the Indigenous People's Global Summit on Climate Change**

Dear Friends,
Brothers and Sisters All,

As this Global Summit of Indigenous Peoples on Climate Change comes to its conclusion, I wish to thank you for inviting me to participate in this extraordinary gathering. I am honoured to be among you all and congratulate you on adopting a strong declaration and plan of action that will find echo in the months and years ahead.

All too often, high level meetings and reports on climate change make only scarce mention of indigenous peoples, and then only in certain regions and as helpless victims of changes beyond their control. You have been instrumental in shifting the focus so that indigenous peoples all now regarded as primary actors within global climate change monitoring, adaptation and innovation. This is an area in which indigenous peoples must have a voice in policy formation and action in the same way you do in other relevant UN processes such as the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the World Intellectual Property Organization, the Human Rights Council and now, I trust, in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as well.

Your declaration and plan of action represent an important step in asserting the right of indigenous peoples to play a significant role in changing the dominant mindset that has brought us so close to self-destruction. Both your declaration and your plan of action make it crystal clear that indigenous peoples must fully and effectively participate in the national and intergovernmental bodies that are addressing the diverse and complex problems we have created for Mother Earth. I assure you that I will share this declaration with the members of the General the Assembly for all to consider.

We have reached a critical juncture at this point in our human odyssey. As scientists have pointed out, we are approaching and may have already reached a tipping point at which the damage that we are doing to the environment is irreversible. We face a future of inexorable decline as we destroy the fragile ecosystems that support all life on our planet. The question before us is how to slow this decline or, in the best of scenarios, how to reverse it and return our planet to good health?

At the same time, it is true that we are also approaching a tipping point in our collective awareness of the terrible harm our species is inflicting on dear Mother Earth. We are now aware of the miraculous intricacy of our land and marine biodiversity as well as their fragility. Indigenous people have always served as a reminder of the miracle of Mother Nature and they are now finally being listened to as never before.

Still we humans continue to squander our natural abundance in a manifestation of absolute social and ecological irresponsibility without concern about the consequence of our behavior for future generations. The unfolding global economic and financial crisis must be seen not only as policy failures, but as a warning that we must change our life style, change our society's anti-values and put solidarity, justice and love at the very center of all our human understandings.

I have come to this Summit to bring assurances that the United Nations stands in solidarity with the indigenous peoples of the world and their efforts to participate in the global movement to address the issues of climate changes on the most urgent basis.

Together we are putting people and the well-being of the planet at the centre of our attention and recognizing good stewardship of our dwindling resources as a shared responsibility. Mother Earth, after all, nurtures and sustains life and our very humanity. It is only right that we, as Sisters and Brothers that we are, take care of Mother Earth in return.

Let us follow the example of indigenous peoples and become good stewards once again. Let us listen to the wisdom of indigenous peoples who, despite all odds, have sustained their profound links to nature. Let us support the billion small food producers who, with sustainable farming methods, can continue to provide us with healthy food and not be driven into abject poverty by unfair trade policies and rapacious agro-industries.

Three days ago, the General Assembly adopted a resolution to mark April 22nd as the International Day of Mother Earth each year. The Assembly was honoured to hear President Evo Morales Ayma of the Plurinational State of Bolivia explain the importance of this proclamation, the only head of State to do so. As perhaps the best known representative of the first peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean, President Morales has become a leading voice in defending Mother Earth. His is the voice of the indigenous peoples.

Finally, I want you to know that the General Assembly has decided to hold a summit of leaders of all 192 Member States in the first week of June to look for ways to address the ongoing global economic crisis. We believe that we must meet the immediate need of vulnerable groups affected by the meltdown and change the dominant economic and financial policies as well. Only by giving a voice to all those who are affected can we come up with solutions that are fair and supported by everyone. The UN must assure this effective inclusiveness.

I thank you all for stepping forward and taking your rightful place among the defenders of our Mother Earth. Your example serves as an inspiration for all of us to follow.

Thank you.

May God bless you abundantly and give clarity of mind and physical and spiritual strength to continue in our relentless nonviolent struggle for a better, more brotherly and sisterly world.

Let's remain in each other's thoughts and prayers.