

# United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples





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## Joint Statement on Implementation - March 2011

*“Implementation of the Declaration should be regarded as a political, moral and legal imperative without qualification.”*

Professor James Anaya, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, August 2010 report to the UN General Assembly

Indigenous peoples globally continue to face dispossession of their lands and resources, discrimination, forced assimilation and other grave human rights abuses. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*<sup>1</sup> is the most comprehensive international human rights instrument to specifically address their economic, social, cultural, political, civil, spiritual and environmental rights. In its own words, the *Declaration* sets out minimum standards necessary for the “dignity, survival and well-being” of Indigenous peoples.

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<sup>1</sup> General Assembly Resolution 61/295 (Annex), UN GAOR, 61st Sess., Supp. No. 49, Vol. III, UN Doc. A/61/49 (2008) 15



The UN General Assembly overwhelmingly adopted the *Declaration* on 13 September 2007. This historic adoption followed more than twenty years of deliberation and debate in which Indigenous peoples worked directly with states to elaborate upon and advance their human rights. This marked the first time within the UN that rights holders had such a central role in the creation of a new human rights instrument.

The *Declaration* affirms Indigenous peoples' right of self-determination and underlines the prohibition of discrimination and genocide in international law. The *Declaration* calls on states to honour and respect the Treaties and other agreements they have entered into with Indigenous peoples, to protect Indigenous languages and cultures, and to uphold Indigenous peoples' rights to lands, territories and resources.

The *Declaration* affirms the inherent or pre-existing collective human rights of Indigenous peoples, as well as the human rights of Indigenous individuals. It provides a framework for justice and reconciliation, applying existing human rights



standards to the specific historical, cultural and social circumstances of Indigenous peoples.

The *Declaration* reflects a range of human rights standards that have emerged over the last three decades through the work of international and regional human rights bodies as they have dealt with violations against Indigenous peoples. Many of these standards, such as the provisions of international human rights conventions or customary international law, establish clear legal obligations for states.

As we actively engage with the full and effective implementation of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, we urge that:

**Governments**, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, use the *Declaration* as the basis for reviewing and reforming laws and policies to ensure that Indigenous peoples' rights are upheld without discrimination.

**Courts and human rights tribunals** use the *Declaration* as a relevant and persuasive source in interpreting Indigenous human rights and related state obligations.



**Indigenous peoples and their institutions** use the *Declaration* as a principled framework for advancing their rights, in their own policy- and decision-making and in their negotiations with governments and other third parties.

**Civil society organizations** work cooperatively with Indigenous peoples, in promoting and implementing their human rights and maintaining the *Declaration* as a living instrument.

**Educational institutions** include the *Declaration* in their curriculum, including teacher training.

**Corporations and investors** ensure their human rights policies and business practices incorporate the standards in the *Declaration*.

The global consensus that now exists in support of the *Declaration* reinforces its weight as a universal human rights instrument. The ongoing and widespread human rights violations against Indigenous peoples worldwide underline the urgency of moving ahead with the full and effective implementation of the *Declaration*.



## **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

*The General Assembly,*

*Guided* by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and good faith in the fulfilment of the obligations assumed by States in accordance with the Charter,

*Affirming* that indigenous peoples are equal to all other peoples, while recognizing the right of all peoples to be different, to consider themselves different, and to be respected as such,

*Affirming also* that all peoples contribute to the diversity and richness of civilizations and cultures, which constitute the common heritage of humankind,

*Affirming further* that all doctrines, policies and practices based on or advocating superiority of peoples or individuals on the basis of national origin or racial, religious, ethnic or cultural differences are racist, scientifically false, legally invalid, morally condemnable and socially unjust,





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*Reaffirming* that indigenous peoples, in the exercise of their rights, should be free from discrimination of any kind,

*Concerned* that indigenous peoples have suffered from historic injustices as a result of, inter alia, their colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources, thus preventing them from exercising, in particular, their right to development in accordance with their own needs and interests,

*Recognizing* the urgent need to respect and promote the inherent rights of indigenous peoples which derive from their political, economic and social structures and from their cultures, spiritual traditions, histories and philosophies, especially their rights to their lands, territories and resources,

*Recognizing also* the urgent need to respect and promote the rights of indigenous peoples affirmed in treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements with States,



*Welcoming* the fact that indigenous peoples are organizing themselves for political, economic, social and cultural enhancement and in order to bring to an end all forms of discrimination and oppression wherever they occur,

*Convinced* that control by indigenous peoples over developments affecting them and their lands, territories and resources will enable them to maintain and strengthen their institutions, cultures and traditions, and to promote their development in accordance with their aspirations and needs,

*Recognizing* that respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment,

*Emphasizing* the contribution of the demilitarization of the lands and territories of indigenous peoples to peace, economic and social progress and development, understanding and friendly relations among nations and peoples of the world,



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*Recognizing in particular* the right of indigenous families and communities to retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, training, education and well-being of their children, consistent with the rights of the child,

*Considering* that the rights affirmed in treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements between States and indigenous peoples are, in some situations, matters of international concern, interest, responsibility and character,

*Considering also* that treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements, and the relationship they represent, are the basis for a strengthened partnership between indigenous peoples and States,

*Acknowledging* that the Charter of the United Nations, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>2</sup> and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,<sup>2</sup> as well as

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<sup>2</sup> See resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.



the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action,<sup>3</sup> affirm the fundamental importance of the right to self-determination of all peoples, by virtue of which they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development,

*Bearing in mind* that nothing in this Declaration may be used to deny any peoples their right to self-determination, exercised in conformity with international law,

*Convinced* that the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples in this Declaration will enhance harmonious and cooperative relations between the State and indigenous peoples, based on principles of justice, democracy, respect for human rights, non-discrimination and good faith,

*Encouraging* States to comply with and effectively implement all their obligations as they apply to indigenous peoples under international instruments, in particular those related to human

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<sup>3</sup> A/CONF.157/24 (Part I), chap. III.



rights, in consultation and cooperation with the peoples concerned,

*Emphasizing* that the United Nations has an important and continuing role to play in promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples,

*Believing* that this Declaration is a further important step forward for the recognition, promotion and protection of the rights and freedoms of indigenous peoples and in the development of relevant activities of the United Nations system in this field,

*Recognizing and reaffirming* that indigenous individuals are entitled without discrimination to all human rights recognized in international law, and that indigenous peoples possess collective rights which are indispensable for their existence, well-being and integral development as peoples,

*Recognizing* that the situation of indigenous peoples varies from region to region and from country to country and that the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical and cultural backgrounds should be



taken into consideration,

*Solemnly proclaims* the following United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a standard of achievement to be pursued in a spirit of partnership and mutual respect:

### **Article 1**

Indigenous peoples have the right to the full enjoyment, as a collective or as individuals, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms as recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>4</sup> and international human rights law.

### **Article 2**

Indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular that based on their indigenous origin or identity.

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<sup>4</sup> Resolution 217 A (III).



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### **Article 3**

Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

### **Article 4**

Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.

### **Article 5**

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions, while retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State.



### **Article 6**

Every indigenous individual has the right to a nationality.

### **Article 7**

1. Indigenous individuals have the rights to life, physical and mental integrity, liberty and security of person.
2. Indigenous peoples have the collective right to live in freedom, peace and security as distinct peoples and shall not be subjected to any act of genocide or any other act of violence, including forcibly removing children of the group to another group.

### **Article 8**

1. Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture.
2. States shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for:





- (a) Any action which has the aim or effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities;
- (b) Any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them of their lands, territories or resources;
- (c) Any form of forced population transfer which has the aim or effect of violating or undermining any of their rights;
- (d) Any form of forced assimilation or integration;
- (e) Any form of propaganda designed to promote or incite racial or ethnic discrimination directed against them.

## **Article 9**

Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right to belong to an indigenous community or nation, in accordance with the traditions and customs of the community or nation concerned. No



discrimination of any kind may arise from the exercise of such a right.

### **Article 10**

Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return.

### **Article 11**

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.
2. States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution,



developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs.

## **Article 12**

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.
2. States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned.



### **Article 13**

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.
2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected and also to ensure that indigenous peoples can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means.

### **Article 14**

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children,



have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.

3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

### **Article 15**

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information.
2. States shall take effective measures, in consultation and cooperation with the indigenous peoples concerned, to combat prejudice and eliminate discrimination and to promote tolerance, understanding and good relations among indigenous peoples and all other segments of society.



## **Article 16**

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-indigenous media without discrimination.
2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that State-owned media duly reflect indigenous cultural diversity. States, without prejudice to ensuring full freedom of expression, should encourage privately owned media to adequately reflect indigenous cultural diversity.

## **Article 17**

1. Indigenous individuals and peoples have the right to enjoy fully all rights established under applicable international and domestic labour law.
2. States shall in consultation and cooperation with indigenous peoples take specific measures to protect indigenous children from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the



child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development, taking into account their special vulnerability and the importance of education for their empowerment.

3. Indigenous individuals have the right not to be subjected to any discriminatory conditions of labour and, inter alia, employment or salary.

### **Article 18**

Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions.

### **Article 19**

States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent



before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.

### **Article 20**

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and develop their political, economic and social systems or institutions, to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities.
2. Indigenous peoples deprived of their means of subsistence and development are entitled to just and fair redress.

### **Article 21**

1. Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.





2. States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.

## **Article 22**

1. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities in the implementation of this Declaration.
2. States shall take measures, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination.



### **Article 23**

Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.

### **Article 24**

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals. Indigenous individuals also have the right to access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services.
2. Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States shall take the necessary steps with a view to



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achieving progressively the full realization of this right.

### **Article 25**

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.

### **Article 26**

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.
2. Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they



have otherwise acquired.

3. States shall give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories and resources. Such recognition shall be conducted with due respect to the customs, traditions and land tenure systems of the indigenous peoples concerned.

### **Article 27**

States shall establish and implement, in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned, a fair, independent, impartial, open and transparent process, giving due recognition to indigenous peoples' laws, traditions, customs and land tenure systems, to recognize and adjudicate the rights of indigenous peoples pertaining to their lands, territories and resources, including those which were traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used. Indigenous peoples shall have the right to participate in this process.



## **Article 28**

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to redress, by means that can include restitution or, when this is not possible, just, fair and equitable compensation, for the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used, and which have been confiscated, taken, occupied, used or damaged without their free, prior and informed consent.
2. Unless otherwise freely agreed upon by the peoples concerned, compensation shall take the form of lands, territories and resources equal in quality, size and legal status or of monetary compensation or other appropriate redress.

## **Article 29**

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. States shall establish and implement assistance programmes for



indigenous peoples for such conservation and protection, without discrimination.

2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that no storage or disposal of hazardous materials shall take place in the lands or territories of indigenous peoples without their free, prior and informed consent.
3. States shall also take effective measures to ensure, as needed, that programmes for monitoring, maintaining and restoring the health of indigenous peoples, as developed and implemented by the peoples affected by such materials, are duly implemented.

### **Article 30**

1. Military activities shall not take place in the lands or territories of indigenous peoples, unless justified by a relevant public interest or otherwise freely agreed with or requested by the indigenous peoples concerned.
2. States shall undertake effective consultations with the indigenous peoples concerned,



through appropriate procedures and in particular through their representative institutions, prior to using their lands or territories for military activities.

### **Article 31**

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.
2. In conjunction with indigenous peoples, States shall take effective measures to recognize and protect the exercise of these rights.



## **Article 32**

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories and other resources.
2. States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.
3. States shall provide effective mechanisms for just and fair redress for any such activities, and appropriate measures shall be taken to mitigate adverse environmental, economic, social, cultural or spiritual impact.





### **Article 33**

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to determine their own identity or membership in accordance with their customs and traditions. This does not impair the right of indigenous individuals to obtain citizenship of the States in which they live.
2. Indigenous peoples have the right to determine the structures and to select the membership of their institutions in accordance with their own procedures.

### **Article 34**

Indigenous peoples have the right to promote, develop and maintain their institutional structures and their distinctive customs, spirituality, traditions, procedures, practices and, in the cases where they exist, juridical systems or customs, in accordance with international human rights standards.



### **Article 35**

Indigenous peoples have the right to determine the responsibilities of individuals to their communities.

### **Article 36**

1. Indigenous peoples, in particular those divided by international borders, have the right to maintain and develop contacts, relations and cooperation, including activities for spiritual, cultural, political, economic and social purposes, with their own members as well as other peoples across borders.
2. States, in consultation and cooperation with indigenous peoples, shall take effective measures to facilitate the exercise and ensure the implementation of this right.

### **Article 37**

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the recognition, observance and enforcement of treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements concluded with States or their



successors and to have States honour and respect such treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements.

2. Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as diminishing or eliminating the rights of indigenous peoples contained in treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements.

### **Article 38**

States, in consultation and cooperation with indigenous peoples, shall take the appropriate measures, including legislative measures, to achieve the ends of this Declaration.

### **Article 39**

Indigenous peoples have the right to have access to financial and technical assistance from States and through international cooperation, for the enjoyment of the rights contained in this Declaration.



### **Article 40**

Indigenous peoples have the right to access to and prompt decision through just and fair procedures for the resolution of conflicts and disputes with States or other parties, as well as to effective remedies for all infringements of their individual and collective rights. Such a decision shall give due consideration to the customs, traditions, rules and legal systems of the indigenous peoples concerned and international human rights.

### **Article 41**

The organs and specialized agencies of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations shall contribute to the full realization of the provisions of this Declaration through the mobilization, inter alia, of financial cooperation and technical assistance. Ways and means of ensuring participation of indigenous peoples on issues affecting them shall be established.



### **Article 42**

The United Nations, its bodies, including the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and specialized agencies, including at the country level, and States shall promote respect for and full application of the provisions of this Declaration and follow up the effectiveness of this Declaration.

### **Article 43**

The rights recognized herein constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world.

### **Article 44**

All the rights and freedoms recognized herein are equally guaranteed to male and female indigenous individuals.

### **Article 45**

Nothing in this Declaration may be construed as diminishing or extinguishing the rights indigenous peoples have now or may acquire in the future.



## **Article 46**

1. Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, people, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act contrary to the Charter of the United Nations or construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States.
2. In the exercise of the rights enunciated in the present Declaration, human rights and fundamental freedoms of all shall be respected. The exercise of the rights set forth in this Declaration shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law and in accordance with international human rights obligations. Any such limitations shall be non-discriminatory and strictly necessary solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for meeting the just and most compelling requirements of a democratic society.



3. The provisions set forth in this Declaration shall be interpreted in accordance with the principles of justice, democracy, respect for human rights, equality, non-discrimination, good governance and good faith.



## Supportive Statements

The tragic and brutal story of what happened to us, especially at the hands of the governments, is well known. ... But today, with the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the United Nations General Assembly, we see the opportunity for a new beginning, for another kind of relationship with States in North America and indeed throughout the world.

Statement of Indigenous Representatives from the North American Region, September 13, 2007

Adoption of the Declaration sends a clear message to the international community that the rights of Indigenous Peoples are not separate from or less than the rights of others, but are an integral and indispensable part of a human rights system dedicated to the rights of all.

Joint Statement by Amnesty International, Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers), International Federation of Human Rights Leagues, International Service for Human Rights, and Rights & Democracy, September 14, 2007





The Declaration is a visionary step towards addressing the human rights of indigenous peoples. It sets out a framework on which States can build or rebuild their relationships with indigenous peoples. ... [I]t provides a momentous opportunity for States and indigenous peoples to strengthen their relationships, promote reconciliation and ensure that the past is not repeated.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, International Day of World's Indigenous People, 9 August 2008

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples serves as OHCHR's framework for action to further the advancement and protection of indigenous peoples' rights. The main priority of the Office is to contribute to the promotion and implementation of this key instrument, along with relevant recommendations, comments and observations of UN human rights treaty bodies, and Special Procedures.

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), April 2011



The Declaration constitutes one of the most significant achievements in this field of human rights, and we are confident that it will advance the rights and ensure the continued development of indigenous peoples around the world. The EU was encouraged by the wide support to the Declaration from Indigenous peoples' representatives, as well as the large number of States. ... The challenge before us now, is to make sure that the indigenous peoples will in fact enjoy the rights recognised in the Declaration.

Portugal (on behalf of the European Union),  
Human Rights Council, September 26, 2007

The Declaration contextualizes all existing human rights for Indigenous Peoples and provides therefore the natural frame of reference for work and debate relating to the promotion of indigenous peoples' rights.

Norway, UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of  
Indigenous Peoples, 2009





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