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Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
вопросам образования,  
науки и культуры

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联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Message from Ms Irina Bokova**

**Director-General of UNESCO**

**on the occasion of the International Day of the World's Indigenous People**

**9 August 2012**

At a time when debate has opened on the contours of a new global sustainability agenda, the voices of indigenous peoples must be heard. Their rights, cultures and the knowledge systems must be taken into account.

Indigenous peoples represent some 370 million people, living in almost ninety countries. They are custodians to a great wealth of languages and traditions. They hold unique experience in marrying sustainably cultural and biological diversity. They have access to deep wells of knowledge and creativity.

Indigenous peoples face also the sharpest edges of change – from poverty and social injustice, from discrimination and marginalisation. This cannot stand. To succeed, sustainable development must be inclusive. All voices must not only be heard but listened to.

This is why indigenous media is so important.

In a world changing quickly, media and communication are essential tools for education, for sharing knowledge and information. They are vital means for voicing experiences and opinions, along with visions and aspirations. This power can be transformational for peoples suffering from isolation and discrimination.

It is especially important for indigenous women, whose voices are shunted aside, and who are making already a significant contribution to local human development. The media can help educate and inform. They can include and bolster voices. They can also promote changes in attitudes and social behaviour, and help identify sustainable opportunities for development that are inclusive and equitable.

These are all ways to take forward the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples agreed by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2007. The media can be a powerful motor to promote equity, inclusion and social justice.

Access is important, but making the most of the media requires skills and capabilities.

UNESCO acts at all of these levels. We are working to facilitate access for indigenous people, especially women, to the public sphere through the media. We lead initiatives to empower women and men in indigenous communities to realize and document the value of their knowledge. We support them in using media they can adopt easily in order to share their experiences widely -- with other indigenous communities, non-governmental organizations, public bodies and decision-makers.

The media are a key to unlock the visions of indigenous peoples of sustainable development. We must harness this power for sustainable development for all.

Irina Bokova