

**Statement by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director
UN Women, for the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples**

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UN Women proudly joins indigenous peoples around the world in celebrating the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous women have struggled for full recognition of their rights and we stand beside them in that struggle. Despite the continued threats to their security, ancestral lands and the environment upon which they depend, indigenous women strive to balance their roles as leaders, producers and transmitters of indigenous knowledge and cultures.

This year's theme, *Indigenous Peoples and the Right to Education*, is timely and aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development's commitment to educational attainment among indigenous women and girls. Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5 present opportunities to give stronger meaning and commitment to educational attainment among indigenous women and girls. Gender equality will only be achieved when we ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training, including for indigenous peoples.

Systemic barriers to educational attainment must be eliminated. These include the expectation that girls should marry and have children before reaching adulthood, the preference for boys in the choice over who should attend school, the risk of physical and sexual violence, and discriminatory policies and teaching practices that prevent girls from upholding their unique cultures in school.

Formal, non-formal and informal education are potent means to enhance the ability of indigenous women to reach their full potential. Knowledge of the rich histories, cultures, languages and farming practices of indigenous peoples are critical life skills that uphold and nurture their unique identity. Formal education must also be promoted to ensure that indigenous girls and women are able to effectively participate in all domains of social, economic and political activity. High levels of illiteracy among indigenous women, however, regrettably attest to the historical patterns of discrimination and exclusion.

Today's celebration is an opportunity to implement the recommendations of the 2009 report of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to the Human Rights Council on *Lessons Learned and Challenges to Achieve the Implementation of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to Education*. UN Women believes that integrating indigenous peoples' perspectives into educational curricula, improving infrastructure particularly in remote villages, introducing mobile schools for nomadic communities, and scaling up bilingual education and special scholarship schemes for girls will positively impact upon their ability to enroll in and complete a full course of education to the highest levels.

UN Women's joint programme with UNESCO and UNFPA builds on cross-sectoral approaches and addresses the interface between education, health and gender equality in order to empower adolescent girls and young women. We look forward to making these initiatives

meaningful to indigenous women and girls by working with them at each stage of their design, implementation and monitoring so that their voices will be heard, and no one will be left behind.