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Press Release

.../for immediate release

Message of Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner on the occasion of the International Day of the World's Indigenous People

Today, 9 August, the European Commission joins others around the world in celebrating the International Day of the World's Indigenous People.

It is a day when we honour indigenous peoples across the globe. We pay tribute to their traditions and knowledge, and to the enormous contribution they have made to the world's cultures and to conserving the planet.

We also reflect on what has been achieved to protect their rights and guarantee them equal treatment. And on how much more we need to do.

Perhaps the most important achievement since last year was the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the United Nations' new Human Rights Council. This was the culmination of almost two decades of tireless advocacy by indigenous peoples' representatives. Without their skill and determination we would not have achieved it. They kept their communities back home informed about the UN's discussions, gathered different points of view and agreed a united front, giving them more weight in the negotiations. They also helped UN member states better understand the lives and aspirations of indigenous peoples and the importance of reflecting that in a UN Declaration.

The Declaration's message is equality for all – and we in the European Commission will not rest until indigenous peoples have that equality, wherever they live in the world.

We must meet the high expectations people have of the second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (2005 – 2015). We must commit ourselves to ensuring all indigenous peoples everywhere see a positive difference to their lives. And we must help their representatives who worked so hard for the Declaration by fighting with them for a more just and inclusive society, for the benefit of indigenous peoples and all of humanity. “

For more information: http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/human_rights/ip/index.htm