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# Press Conference

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## PRESS CONFERENCE ON NINTH SESSION OF INDIGENOUS FORUM

The Government of New Zealand was now in support of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Pita Sharples, Minister of Māori Affairs of New Zealand, told correspondents today at a Headquarters press conference on the opening day of the ninth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. (See Press Release [HR/5012](#))

“The document is aspirational and sets standards for all peoples,” Mr. Sharples said. He added that the Māori people were “relieved and happy” about the Government’s commitment to the Declaration without any conditions, a decision that he believed would restore New Zealand’s manner in addressing issues of human rights and indigenous rights throughout the world. The Government’s decision to support the Declaration also reflected the impact and influence the newly developed Maori Party had on Government issues.

Also on hand at the briefing were Carlos Mamani Condori, Forum member from Bolivia and Chairperson of the ninth session, and Tonya Gonnella Frichner, member of the Permanent Forum from the United States.

Ms. Frichner congratulated the Government of New Zealand’s support of the Declaration, marking the occasion as a “great day for all of us”.

Mr. Mamani gave an overview of the upcoming events of the Forum, the theme of which would be the impact of development policies on indigenous peoples’ culture and identity. The submission of a report by former Chairperson Victoria Tauli-Corpuz from an experts meeting held at the beginning of the year would mark the beginning of an open dialogue between Governments, international associations and indigenous peoples. Upcoming dialogues on forests would be extremely important as the world addressed looming global warming and climate change issues. He noted that events held on the issues of indigenous peoples would include a special screening of the film *Avatar* with Director James Cameron on Saturday, 24 April, and he invited correspondents to attend the discussion.

Asked about how the Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen affected indigenous peoples, Mr. Mamani said that what had happened in Copenhagen was “regrettable” for indigenous peoples, as they were not considered a part of the negotiations. However, with the upcoming climate talks in Cochabamba, Bolivia, indigenous peoples were forming concepts and would defend the quality of what they consider “Mother Earth”. The hope would be that the vision the indigenous peoples had for the world would be taken up by all of humankind and expressed by each world Government.

In response to questions regarding those countries that had not yet adopted the Declaration, Ms. Frichner said she was hopeful. The Government of Canada had indicated in the past month that it was moving towards adopting the Declaration, and President Barack Obama had stated to indigenous leaders in the United States that he was committed to the adoption of the Declaration. United States Ambassador Susan Rice would be addressing the Permanent Forum during this session, which she saw as a positive move. In terms of countries that abstained from or were not present when the Declaration had first been signed in 2007, she said that indigenous delegates had been lobbying those countries and had made some advancement -- for example, Colombia had now moved to support the Declaration.

Asked what could be done to make the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples legally binding, Mr. Mamani said he saw the Declaration as a first expression that indigenous peoples do have fundamental rights. As indigenous peoples had seen their rights violated due

to colonization over the years, the Declaration was a good start in the acknowledgement and exercise of their rights. It was very similar to the way in which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was binding, in itself, as it discussed the basic fundamentals of all people.

He also added that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's statement that indigenous peoples were a part of the United Nations was a positive expression. The Declaration was, therefore, a framework through which indigenous peoples would become a part of the United Nations, he said.

In response to a question on whether indigenous peoples would be formulating their own indicators on poverty, in line with achieving the Millennium Development Goals, Mr. Mamani stressed that indigenous peoples were not poor, but rather stricken with poverty. The expansion of the capitalist world, he said, had "seized our lands, appropriated our resources and rendered us victims of poverty". Colonization of their land, he said, was due to the riches their land held. In that regard, both the framework of the Declaration, and separately the idea of restitution, were very important.

Asked which issues would be addressed during the Forum, Ms. Frischner said that issues on treaties for North America, forests, environmental challenges, violence against women, children and adoption, and conflict would be presented.

Asked to clarify New Zealand's action in relation to the Declaration, Mr. Sharples stated that the Government had accepted the Declaration. Both the Declaration and the Waitangi Treaty, which guaranteed the rights and resources of indigenous peoples, would be involved in future country planning. Highlighting the Declaration as a formal manifestation of the Government's relationship to indigenous peoples, he said, was a way of saying "we are together on this".

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