

**Working Group on Indigenous Populations
15th session**

WELCOMING ADDRESS

**by Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky
Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva
28 July 1997**

It gives me great pleasure to welcome to the United Nations representatives of indigenous nations, peoples and organizations from all parts of the world.

Twenty years ago the first major international meeting of indigenous peoples - "The International NGO Conference on Discrimination against Indigenous Peoples in the Americas" - took place here at the United Nations Office in Geneva. Today's special commemoration opening celebrates the substantive contribution of that historic 1977 conference to the United Nations work in this field.

The special identity of indigenous populations is acknowledged throughout our world Organization. Here in Geneva, a city renowned for its internationalism and commitment to the ideals and principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter, the United Nations family as a whole and the Centre for Human Rights in particular are keenly aware of your concerns and of the need to protect and to promote respect for your rights.

Indigenous peoples are playing an increasingly important role in the international community as is witnessed by the large numbers of indigenous representatives here. The United Nations recognizes your contribution as indigenous peoples in all areas of human endeavour. Your practical experience in resource and land management and as protectors of biological diversity is acknowledged by the international community. Your arts, music and cultures provide an inspiration to a new generation. Your ways of life and your respect for the spiritual part of our being offer guidance to us all. Your philosophies, sciences and knowledge are an invaluable source for the future challenges that face our world community.

We are honoured to have you with us at the Palais des Nations. I wish you success in your deliberations at this important meeting.