

UN expert welcomes United States' endorsement of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

(The following statement is issued by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, James Anaya)

GENEVA (17 December 2010) – “I am elated that President Barack Obama has just announced the United States’ support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a groundbreaking development for Native Americans and all those who seek greater protection for human rights across the globe. The United States now joins the vast majority of the world’s States that have endorsed the Declaration, an affirmation of indigenous equality and self-determination that was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007.

“The United States was one of only four States that voted against the Declaration upon its adoption. The others, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, each reversed their positions and endorsed the Declaration through formal pronouncements since the General Assembly vote. The United States now joins these other countries in making opposition to the Declaration a thing of the past.

“The Declaration is the result of years of advocacy by indigenous peoples within the international arena to build a program of action to reverse centuries of denial of basic human rights. It affirms the right of indigenous peoples to continue their existence as distinct communities under conditions of equality within their traditional territories, and to retain and transmit to future generations their cultural identities.

“With its endorsement of the Declaration, the United States strengthens its stated commitment to improve the conditions of Native Americans and to address broken promises. Indigenous peoples can now look to the Declaration as a means of holding the United States to that commitment.

“I look forward to initiatives by the United States to secure implementation of the standards expressed in the Declaration, and I stand ready to assist to this end in coordination with relevant mechanisms of the United Nations.”

On 26 March 2008, the UN Human Rights Council appointed Professor S. James Anaya as Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, for an initial period of three years. Professor Anaya is a Regents Professor and the James J. Lenoir Professor of Human Rights Law and Policy at the University of Arizona (USA).

Learn more about the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous people:
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/indigenous/rapporteur/>

For further information or interview requests, please contact Lydie Ventre (Tel: +41 22 917 93 13 / email: lventre@ohchr.org)