

**Message of the Director-General of the World Health Organization on the Occasion of the International Day of the World's Indigenous People, 9 August 2004**

This day provides us with a unique opportunity to recognize the diversity, accomplishments, and struggles of indigenous peoples and to evaluate our efforts in meeting the goals of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

WHO extends congratulations to the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and to the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues for their accomplishments during the International Decade. Both bodies have done much to advance the cause of indigenous peoples and have emerged as the focal points of international action on indigenous issues. Both afford an essential space where Member States, United Nations bodies and indigenous peoples can come together on equal footing, with a view towards reaching mutual objectives in a spirit of co-operation.

WHO reaffirms its commitment to working with indigenous peoples, Member States, the UN family, donors, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders to improve the health of indigenous peoples.

The World Health Assembly has resolved to urge Member States to recognize and protect the right of indigenous people to the highest attainable standard of health, to make adequate provisions for indigenous health needs, while respecting and maintaining traditional healing practices and remedies.

The evidence shows that ethnicity, particularly in conjunction with poverty, contributes to disparities in health between population groups. WHO is gathering data that will highlight the health situation of marginalized ethnic population groups, including indigenous peoples.

I invite our partners and all those active in the cause of indigenous peoples to join with us in advancing the health of indigenous populations.