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STATEMENT

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

9 August 2003

**by the
Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
Joke Waller-Hunter**

I would like to congratulate the indigenous peoples on this, their special day, on the progress they have achieved in the international arena, and in particular, on the recent establishment of a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues as well as on their participation in the climate change process.

The creation of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues during the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples is a major milestone in the history of the indigenous peoples' struggle for international recognition. The Forum has now completed two sessions and is fulfilling its important advisory role to the United Nations Economic and Social Council on socio-economic matters of critical interest to indigenous peoples, including the environment.

In the climate change debate, indigenous peoples and local communities have been involved from the early 1990s. However, since the Kyoto Protocol was adopted in 1997, their involvement has grown and become more visible. Their representatives attend sessions regularly, have become increasingly active in communicating their concerns to Parties and observers, and have successfully become recognized as an important constituency interest group.

Indigenous peoples are united by their spiritual, cultural and social linkages with their territories, many of which are vulnerable to climate change and its potential solutions. They have taken up this challenge to address climate change by their active participation at an international level. Their knowledge and experience contribute to the climate negotiations, their participation in processes designed to allow local feedback on projects is vital, and their role in raising public awareness on the climate change issues is key.

On this, the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, it is important that we take special note of the contribution and aspirations of indigenous peoples and local communities in addressing complex global issues.