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Adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Joint Statement by Amnesty International, Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers), International Federation of Human Rights Leagues, International Service for Human Rights and Rights & Democracy

Amnesty International, Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers), International Federation of Human Rights Leagues, International Service for Human Rights and Rights & Democracy welcome the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly on 13 September of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We expect all States to work in good faith to implement in their domestic law and practice this vitally important and long overdue human rights instrument, and to seize the historic opportunity presented by adoption of the Declaration to enter into a new relationship with Indigenous Peoples based on a principled commitment to the protection of human rights.

Adoption of the Declaration sends a clear message to the international community that the rights of Indigenous Peoples are not separate from or less than the rights of others, but are an integral and indispensable part of a human rights system dedicated to the rights of all.

The Declaration recognises the rights of Indigenous Peoples to the lands, territories and natural resources that are critical to their ways of life and affirms that Indigenous Peoples, like all peoples, have the right to self-determination. It also provides guidance on basic measures needed to ensure the dignity, survival and well-being of some of the world's most impoverished and marginalised peoples.

The Declaration has been under development for more than two decades within the UN system. It was adopted by the UN Human Rights Council on 29 June 2006, and human rights organisations joined with Indigenous peoples in calling for its immediate adoption by the UN General Assembly. However, final adoption was delayed and further amendments were introduced to accommodate the concerns of some States. We regret that, nevertheless, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA voted against.¹

The adoption of this Declaration is an important milestone on the road to full respect for the rights of Indigenous Peoples. However, the road ahead remains long and arduous. The Human Rights Council must begin to contribute now to the successful realization of the journey of the full and effective implementation of the Declaration.

Thank you.

¹ The Declaration was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 13 September 2007 by a vote of 143 in favour, four against with 11 abstentions.