

# International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples: Declaration by High Representative Josep Borrell, on behalf of the European Union, 9 August 2020



As we mark the International day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, the EU extends its solidarity to all indigenous peoples around the world at a time when their health, lives and livelihoods are endangered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Indigenous peoples are among those in the most vulnerable situation in face of the pandemic. Especially older persons, persons with underlying health conditions, persons with disabilities, women and children are at risk both in urban and rural areas, mainly due to pre-existing inequalities and disadvantages. Indigenous peoples are nearly three times more likely to live in extreme poverty compared to other population groups. They often lack access to health care and social services, water and sanitation, to education, and to decent work. Dispossession of lands, environmental degradation, displacement due to conflict and violence, and natural disasters is the reality for many.

In the fight against and the recovery from the pandemic, there is an urgent need to redouble global efforts to tackle the discrimination, racism and inequalities facing indigenous peoples. Response measures must be in accordance with international law, including of human rights law, and take account of the specific needs of indigenous peoples. Importantly, measures affecting indigenous peoples must be taken in consultation and cooperation with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representatives and institutions.

This is why the EU is taking additional response measures aiding indigenous peoples. At the same time, we are continuing our long-standing support for indigenous peoples. The most recent examples include projects to empower Trio and Wajana communities in Suriname and tackling the discrimination indigenous peoples are facing in the Bouenza region in the Republic of Congo.

The recent devastating fires in the Amazon have exposed once more the detrimental impact of climate change on indigenous peoples. The respect and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples in the management and protection of biodiversity and in climate actions need to move to the top of our priorities. This was also a key message from the EU Roundtable with Indigenous Peoples' Experts and Representatives held in February of this year in Brussels. The exchanges of the Roundtable on how the EU can implement better its ambitious Green Deal will inspire the EU's future actions.

The International day is also an occasion to pay tribute to the resilience, ingenuity and resourcefulness of indigenous peoples. They are carriers of invaluable indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage. The EU is inspired by the many indigenous-led effective responses to the pandemic across the world. The EU will continue to work with indigenous peoples and with all our other partners, be they governments, international organisations or civil society, to build back together a better world leaving no one behind. A world where the full enjoyment of human rights by all prevails.