



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

AUGUST 9, 2023

INTRODUCTION


The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is observed on 9 August each year to raise awareness and protect the rights of the world's indigenous population. This event also recognizes the achievements and contributions that indigenous people make to improve world issues such as environmental protection. The theme for this year is The Role of Indigenous Women in the Preservation and Transmission of Traditional Knowledge.

Indigenous peoples are inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment. They have retained social, cultural, economic, and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live. Despite their cultural differences, indigenous peoples from around the world share common problems related to the protection of their rights as distinct peoples.

There are an estimated 476 million indigenous peoples in the world living across 90 countries. They make up less than 5 per cent of the world's population, but account for 15 per cent of the poorest. They speak an overwhelming majority of the world's estimated 7,000 languages and represent 5,000 different cultures. Globally, 47% of all indigenous peoples in employment have no education, compared to 17% of their non-indigenous counterparts. (Data from the UN website: <https://www.un.org/en/observances/indigenous-day/background>)

Indigenous peoples have sought recognition of their identities, their way of life and their right to traditional lands, territories and natural resources for years. Yet, throughout history, their rights have been violated. Indigenous peoples today, are arguably among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of people in the world. The international community now recognizes that special measures are required to protect their rights and maintain their distinct cultures and way of life.

The interest of the Founder in anthropology led us to assume missions in indigenous areas in various countries. The presence of the SVDs among indigenous groups has been the result of the personal conviction of self-sacrificing confreres as well as of a well-planned mission assumed collectively. Vivat International in collaboration with the religious of its 11 congregation members is using the UN mechanisms to defend indigenous people who are being displaced from their territories. Several SVD confreres are collaborating in networks and organizations to protect and empower the indigenous people.





BIBLICAL TEXT:

Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

Where you die, I will die-- there will I be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!"

(Ruth 1:16-17 NRSV)

REFLECTION:

An attentive reader of the Bible quickly discovers that at least ten noteworthy non-Jewish women indigenous to the land of Canaan and its neighboring regions played significant roles in biblical history. These native women were instruments of God's will, and their actions and decisions profoundly influenced the history of God's chosen people.

Ruth, a woman hailing from the land of Moab neighboring Israel, stands out among them. Initially, she married into the family of Naomi, an Israelite woman, but tragically became a widow. According to the prevailing customs of the time, Ruth was expected to return to her own people, thus ensuring the ongoing protection of her native family in the absence of her deceased Israelite husband. Contrary to this custom, Ruth made a remarkable choice: to stay with her mother-in-law and accompany her to Bethlehem. This decision showcased her unwavering commitment to her chosen loyalties and, ultimately, her resolve to shape her own destiny. In the end, Ruth became the great-grandmother of King David, the founder of the first Israelite Kingdom.

The story of Ruth, along with the remarkable deeds of other native women from the biblical lands, clearly demonstrate that ethnic and gender boundaries do not constrain God's will and salvific designs. People indigenous to any land have always played an integral part in God's work based on their own unique abilities, cultures, and merits. In fact, their unique connection to their native origins has, time and again, contributed significantly to the Church's mission and to the broader civil society. Unfortunately, this pivotal contribution has often been underestimated and underappreciated.



MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES:

1. Focus on the priorities: Indigenous people in various parts of the world have numerous concerns. First, set priorities of those indigenous people with whom you work. Consult them and involve them in deciding their goals, aspirations and demands.

2. Apply the law to ensure land rights are protected: Laws on land rights are often good in most of the countries, but they're universally flouted. Land is the most important part of any indigenous group. Use all means to protect the lands of indigenous people. Indigenous people need to be consulted before making use of their land.

3. Education as a priority: Education of the indigenous people is an important element for the progress of this community. Both boys and girls without discrimination, need to be educated for their future progress and development.

4. Involve them in Laudato Si Action Platform: Lands inhabited by Indigenous Peoples contain 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity. Indigenous Peoples' traditional knowledge and knowledge systems are key to designing a sustainable future for all. Involve them in the protection of the environment and biodiversity.

5. Facilitate dialogue: Facilitate dialogue and cooperation with a wide range of actors including State authorities, parliamentarians, national human rights institutions, indigenous group leaders and NGOs for promoting integral development of them.

6. Protect the rights of indigenous cultures: Find ways to protect their culture, which is very rich and gives them identity. The right of indigenous peoples to self-determination implies their right to maintain, control, protect and develop their own cultural heritage. The safeguard and development of the cultures of indigenous peoples require the protection of their lands, territories and resources.

7. Assert the human rights and human dignity: Indigenous people have to assert their human rights and human dignity. Join with the other NGOs and like-minded groups and always assert their human rights. The church organizations could take the lead in this aspect, although in some countries it becomes a very sensitive issue.

8. Give them space in decision-making bodies: Give them space in leadership and decision-making bodies. This could be in politics, economic forums, cultural forums, in the church, etc. Through this, they can assert their rights and at the same time develop leadership skills.





PRAYER FOR THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES 2023

Let us pray to God our Creator on this International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples that we all may recognize the Indigenous Peoples of the whole world, with their cultures, languages, traditions and spirituality, and respect their dignity and their rights, in the knowledge that the richness of our great human family consists precisely in its diversity.

L.: Creator God of all people, we look at your world and praise you for the diversity all around us.

A.: We thank you for the gift of relationships; our connection with people and all creation.

L.: Help us to listen and understand; to meet one another with wonder and anticipation.

A.: Help us to love as you love, without expectation.

L.: Lead us to understand how Indigenous peoples have been and continue to be profoundly harmed.

A.: Lead us and all to repent when we deny Indigenous peoples respect, dignity and fullness of life.

L.: Help us to seek the peace, justice and reconciliation you desire among all your children.

A.: Help us to listen compassionately, to speak humbly and to act justly.

L.: Praise the LORD, all you nations; glorify him, all you peoples!

A.: For steadfast is his kindness toward us, and the fidelity of the LORD endures forever!

(Inspired by a prayer of Dianne Climenhage, MCC ACRR)