



Euclides Macuxi Pereira
Indigenous leader

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By [resolution 49/214](#) of 23 December 1994, the General Assembly of the United Nations decided to celebrate the International Day of the World's Indigenous People on 9 August every year. Among other things, this event also recognizes the achievements and contributions that indigenous people make to addressing such worldwide issues as environmental protection. Read the interview with Macuxi leader **Euclides Pereira**, who will be speaking on behalf of indigenous peoples worldwide at the XIII World Forestry Congress.



[\[watch the interview\]](#)

Rome, FAO headquarters - By [resolution 49/214](#) of 23 December 1994, the General Assembly of the United Nations decided to celebrate the International Day of the World's Indigenous People on 9 August every year, during the [International Decade of the World's Indigenous People](#). Among other things, this event also recognizes the achievements and contributions that indigenous people make to addressing such worldwide issues as environmental protection. In 2004, the assembly proclaimed a Second International Decade by [resolution 59/174](#). The goal of this decade is to further strengthen international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people in such areas as culture, education, health, human rights, the environment, and social and economic development. Read the interview with Macuxi leader Euclides Pereira, who will be speaking on behalf of indigenous peoples worldwide at the XIII World Forestry Congress.

Q) How does the participation of indigenous peoples broaden and deepen the multiple goals of sustainable forestry?

A) For centuries, indigenous peoples have shown their ability to live in harmony with nature. By seeing themselves as part of it, rather than treating it as some outside entity to be dominated, indigenous peoples were wise in ways of protecting their natural resources, especially forests and other types of vegetation, considering their importance for climate balance, farming activities, harvesting, and the preservation of surface and subterranean water and biodiversity resources. Farming peoples also knew how to protect forests through forest-fallow agriculture and rotating the use of different parts of their land to ensure rehabilitation of the soil and affected biome. Large-scale non-industrial extraction in connection with farming, hunting and the harvesting of plant resources, such as timber for building or material for natural medicine, has allowed the conservation of wide swathes of forest, as is clearly seen in the indigenous lands of Amazonia, both in Brazil and in other countries.

There is no doubt that until today indigenous people have been making a major contribution to forest conservation, causing a reduction in global warming and restoration of the balance upset by climate change. Regrettably, their commitment is countered by a ruinous development model that concentrates on deforestation, single-crop farming, agricultural exports, livestock rearing and large-scale infrastructure projects for agribusiness and trade, and is basically concerned solely with profit and has no interest in the fate and well-being of future generations.

Indigenous tradition and culture are undoubtedly antithetical to the approach of the current economic model.

Q) You will be attending the WFC as spokesman for all indigenous peoples. What is the common understanding at the heart of the following forest-related proverb, and which values does it contain that western culture could benefit from taking into account: “Earth is not a gift from our parents, it is a loan from our children” (Kenya)?

A) As has already been said, the relationship between indigenous peoples and nature is different from that found in the west, where the environment is seen as something external to be exploited. The earth and its resources are not seen solely as the physical source of subsistence needs or production assets, for apart from these material factors, there is a spiritual dimension. This perspective ensures a relationship that is not utilitarian and does not focus exclusively on today's consumption. The spiritual link, which means that the earth can be seen as mother, leads to a concern to ensure its integrity and preservation for the good of future generations.

This relationship and feeling of being part of nature and not opposed to it should be an example for western culture to follow.

*A primary school teacher in Macuxi villages, **Euclides Macuxi Pereira** headed the Coordination of the Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (COIAB) between 1998 and 2001, and is now completing a degree in social sciences at the Federal University of Roraima. One of the main indigenous leaders in Roraima, he was in charge of managing the Ministry of the Environment's Demonstration Project for Indigenous Peoples (PDPI). Apart from the various activities connected with these tasks, Euclides Pereira concentrates on the priority spheres of the indigenous population, focusing on such public services as education and health.*