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Twelfth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

New York, 20-31 May 2013

Provisional Agenda Item 7: Human rights

Statement by Mr. Shankar Limbu

on behalf of the

Board of Trustees of the

United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations

Distinguished Chair, government delegates, Indigenous sisters and brothers, ladies and gentlemen,

I thank you for giving me this opportunity to take the floor to address the Twelfth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples. I would like to seize this opportunity to welcome the twenty-seven (27) beneficiaries of the Fund for present with us during this session.

As you well know, the mandate of the Fund is to assist representatives of Indigenous organizations and communities to effectively participate in the sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Human Rights Council and its Universal Periodic Review, and of human rights treaty bodies. In 2012, the mandate of the Fund was expanded to include support for Indigenous Peoples to participate in the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, to be held in 2014.

Since its establishment in 1985, the Fund has enabled approximately 1,600 Indigenous representatives to participate in UN processes and mechanisms, thereby

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contributing towards ensuring that the voices and concerns of Indigenous Peoples are heard at the UN and contributing to increased international awareness of the rights, status, and conditions of Indigenous Peoples worldwide. Without the financial support of the Fund, many Indigenous Peoples would face severe challenges in their ability to participate in these important international human rights processes.

The Board of Trustees believes that with knowledge and preparation, Indigenous Peoples can continue to use the international system as a strategy to secure their rights. In an effort to build the capacity of Indigenous beneficiaries and contribute to ensuring a more effective use of international mechanisms, the Fund currently supports human rights training for beneficiaries, including during this session of the Forum, organized in partnership with DoCip.

While participation is crucial to developing the understanding of international processes, this should be seen only as the first step of international advocacy. The more difficult work is done back home through disseminating, informing stake holder and monitoring the implementations of recommendations. With this in mind, the Fund has increased its efforts to develop opportunities for beneficiaries that go beyond awarding a travel grant. This includes linking beneficiaries with UN presences in the field and with human rights mechanisms and mandates, as well as trainings.

I would also like to share with you that the Fund and the University of Arizona are currently drafting a Practical Guide for Indigenous Peoples engaging with the UN mechanisms. We hope this Guide will help Indigenous Peoples better understand UN mechanisms and be adequately prepared to successfully advocate for their rights at the international level. On behalf of the Board, I would like to invite all those attending the sixth session of the Expert Mechanism to the launch of the Guide.

Let me give you an update of the activities of the Board. In 2012, a total of fifty-four (54) travel grants were awarded to representatives of Indigenous communities and organizations to participate in the following sessions: the Permanent Forum, the Expert Mechanism, the Human Rights Council and its UPR process, as well the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Elimination of

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Racial Discrimination, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Committee Against Torture. Unfortunately, the Voluntary Fund could not fully meet the demand for support in light of the very limited resources available.

For 2013, the Board of Trustees has so far selected sixty-four (64) Indigenous representatives to attend the sessions of the Permanent Forum, the Expert Mechanism, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review, and the Human Rights Council.

Furthermore, the Board set a budget line to allow 10 (ten) Indigenous representatives – to be selected at the next two inter-sessional meetings in August and November 2013 – to attend the sessions of the human rights mechanisms that will take place between October 2013 and March 2014.

In order to bolster this on-going work and to ensure support for participation of Indigenous Peoples' representatives in the process leading to the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples and beyond, it is imperative that the Fund receives increasing support by governments and other donors. Although the level of contributions received in 2013 has increased in comparison to the previous years, the uncertainty about future contributions has impacted the delivery of our mandate. The truth is that for the past four years, the Fund has struggled financially. As a result, we need to make sure that the increased level of resources of the Fund is sustained and the commitment of states and donors are renewed annually to ensure the important work of the Fund is continued.

The Board of Trustees of the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples is, therefore, appealing to all UN member states to express their support and commitment to Indigenous Peoples world-wide by making a contribution to the Fund.

Finally, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, I would like to express our deepest appreciation to the governments of Argentina, Australia, Chile, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Germany, the Holy See, Mexico, Norway, Peru, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden and Turkey for their generous contributions to the Voluntary Fund in 2012.