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**PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES
SEVENTH SESSION**

**Implementation of the recommendations of the six mandated areas of
the Permanent Forum and on the Millennium Development Goals
Agenda Item: 4**

**Statement
by
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**24 April 2008
New York**

Madam Chair,
Distinguished members of the Forum,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) would like to briefly address the Permanent Forum on the issue of the recommendations on culture, health and human rights, which are at the core of our mandate. On this occasion, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- Intercultural approaches to economic, social and cultural rights are essential to ensure acceptable access to quality basic services for indigenous peoples all over the world. As you are aware, the United Nations Development Group elaborated comprehensive guidelines aimed at equipping UN Country Teams with programmatic tools to allow UN agencies and funds to design programmes to ensure that needs and rights of indigenous peoples are taken into account, including intercultural approaches to health.
- These guidelines, although not mandatory, are very useful to encourage the UN and the governments that the UN supports, to systematically include indigenous issues in national development frameworks and poverty reduction strategies and for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. They are an effort to address some of the recommendations of the Forum on health, culture and human rights. We respectfully suggest to the Forum to include recommendations on the follow up of the guidelines.
- The subjects of culture, human rights, and health are inter-linked. Advancing human rights becomes an empty exercise and a rhetorical stand if cultural diversity and identity are not taken into account. In that sense, it is worthy to note that the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health noted in his last annual report submitted to the Human Rights Council that “[a] health system must be respectful of cultural difference. Health workers, for example, should be sensitive to issues of ethnicity and culture. Also, a health system is required to take into account traditional preventive care, healing practices and medicines.”
- In UNFPA we believe, as the Rapporteur stated, that cultural respect is a right as a matter of principle. But, additionally, it makes sense as a matter of practice. This is why for UNFPA to design and promote programmes and policies that take into account cultural practices and involve traditional leaders is a matter of priority. In that respect, we are following the Forum’s recommendation “to integrate human rights, including reproductive health rights, and special concerns and needs of indigenous women into their programmes and policies, and to report regularly to the Forum.”
- The mention of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health is not by chance. As you know, Rapporteurs are special procedures of the Human Rights Council that contribute significantly to the advancement of standards at the national level and - where it matters most - at the local level. They do that through their thematic reports, missions and publications and by making rights more specific, accessible, practical and operational.
- UN Treaty bodies such as the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, or the Committee on the Rights of the Child or CEDAW Committee are instrumental to advance the treaties that they guard, by interpreting the standards and giving life to the Articles in view of the new realities and concerns. They do that by elaborating general comments and examining state reports on the implementation of the respective Conventions and Covenants. In that sense, we also respectfully suggest the distinguished members of the Forum to make recommendations to treaty bodies and special procedures to have indigenous concerns mainstreamed into their respective

mandates. Treaty bodies and special procedures can do so by preparing general recommendations on inter-cultural approaches, for instance, on the right to health, or on the right to education. Or by taking into consideration and integrating indigenous issues into their country missions.

- We are pleased to convey that UNFPA has carried out a regional initiative for the eradication of maternal mortality among indigenous women through the promotion of public policies and pilot experiences with intercultural strategies. This initiative has started implementation in five countries of the Latin American region, namely, Honduras, Guatemala, Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador, including important lessons learned and best practices from relevant models carried out in Mexico and Panama. Following the Forum's recommendation on prior, free and informed consent, it has carried out recently two consultations with representative of indigenous women organizations of these countries in order to receive their guidance and validate the proposal.
- UNFPA is moving forward to articulate its work with indigenous peoples through the intersection and integration of three key approaches: **Human Rights, Gender Equality** and **Intercultural Approach**. We hope that in the coming years, this approach will help us to improve our support to governments and indigenous groups and contribute to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in becoming a reality.

Thank you