I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN BY CONGRATULATING DALEE SAMBO DOROUGH ON HER ELECTION AS THE NEW CHAIR OF THE FORUM, AND TO THANK THE FORUM FOR GIVING ME A CHANCE TO SPEAK.

WHEN I FIRST HEARD THAT THE UNITED NATIONS WAS HOLDING A CONFERENCE UNDER THE NAME OF WORLD CONFERENCE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES I WAS HOPEFUL. I KNEW THAT IT DEPENDED ON THE GOOD WILL OF STATES BUT I UNDERSTOOD THAT A UN CONFERENCE WAS A MAJOR EVENT—LIKE PAST UN CONFERENCES ON IMPORTANT ISSUES THAT TOOK PLACE OVER TEN-DAY PERIODS AND ATTRACTED MORE THAN 10,000 DELEGATES. THESE UN CONFERENCES PUT TOGETHER ACTION PLANS OF TWO OR THREE HUNDRED ITEMS TO ENSURE THE WORLD HEARD THEIR CALLS FOR JUSTICE.

I WAS ALSO PLEASED THAT THE ACRONYM FOR THE INDIGENOUS CONFERENCE WAS TO BE W.C.I.P.

IT WAS THE SAME ONE THAT MY FATHER’S GENERATION HAD USED IN ESTABLISHING THE GROUND-BREAKING WORLD COUNCIL OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN 1975. I HOPED THAT MEANT THE SAME SPIRIT OF HOPE AND
INDEPENDENCE FOR OUR PEOPLES THAT WAS SIGNALLED BY THE WORLD COUNCIL WOULD BE WITH US IN THIS WORLD CONFERENCE.

BUT AS WE HAVE LEARNED MORE AND MORE ABOUT THIS CONFERENCE, WE HAVE SEEN IT IS A GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES. IN FACT, IT IS WORSE THAN A DISAPPOINTMENT. IT IS AN INSULT TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES.

THE WORLD CONFERENCE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES WILL NOT BE A CONFERENCE WHERE WE ARE PLACED AT THE TOP OF THE WORLD’S AGENDA FOR A WEEK OF SERIOUS EXAMINATION OF OUR ISSUES. WHERE WE AS INDIGENOUS PEOPLES CAN PUT TOGETHER AN ACTION PLAN TO BEGIN REPAIRING THE DAMAGE OF 500 YEARS OF COLONIALISM.

NO. THIS WILL BE A HURRIED HALF-DAY, NOT REALLY A CONFERENCE AT ALL, BUT MORE A SIMPLE PLENARY SESSION, UNDER THE DIRECT CONTROL OF MANY OF THE SAME STATES WHO HAVE, AND CONTINUE TO OPPRESS OUR PEOPLES.

WHEN WE LOOK AT WHAT IS NOW BEING PROPOSED, WE SEE THAT THE REAL WORLD CONFERENCE HAS, IN A REAL SENSE, BEEN CANCELED BY THE UN AND REPLACED BY THIS OTHER THING—THE PLENARY SESSION.
Instead of a serious UN conference, we are being offered a hurried genuflection at the alter of indigenous rights, a short homily from our oppressors and then moving on, not only without any serious initiatives but without even any serious discussions.

This so-called World Conference of Indigenous Peoples is a perpetuation of a reality that has left 370 million of the world’s peoples at the bottom of the ladder, with genocidal forces still squeezing us socially, culturally and politically. In our daily fight for survival, indigenous peoples ask for a dialogue with the world, for respect of our right to determine our own future and to safe-guard our traditional lands. This conference offers none of this things.

This fake WCIP is an insult to indigenous peoples. My late father George Manuel would be deeply offended that the this fake international world conference would bear the acronym of the world council of indigenous peoples.

Let the United Nations call this September meeting what it is—a high plenary session on indigenous issues. And reserve the name of the World Conference of Indigenous Peoples for a true World Conference that we would like to build together with the peoples
OF THE WORLD: A REAL WORLD CONFERENCE DESIGNED BY INDIGENOUS PEOPLES THEMSELVES TO MEET OUR VERY REAL AND VERY URGENT NEEDS. THE SEPTEMBER MEETING IS NONE OF THESE THINGS.