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**United Nation Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues Seventh Session,
New York, April 21 to May 2, 2008.**

North America Indigenous Peoples Regional Statement

**Item 3: Special Theme: "Climate change, biocultural diversity and livelihoods: the
stewardship role of indigenous peoples and new challenges"**

Presented on behalf of the North America Regional Caucus by Andrea Carmen, North America
Indigenous Caucus Co-Coordinator

Thank you Madame Chairman,

This statement is an excerpt of the written report submitted by the North America Region Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 7th Session (UNPFII7) held February 22 – 23, 2008, Coast Salish Territory, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, attended by 49 representatives from 38 Indigenous Nations and organizations from North America (United States and Canada). The report in its entirety is available as Conference Room Paper (CRP) 4 in the official documents for this session [E/C.19/2008/CRP.4].

Addressing the special theme for this session, "*Climate change, bio-cultural diversity and livelihoods: the stewardship role of indigenous peoples and new challenges*", the participants in this meeting from the North American region respectfully express the following to this session of the UNPFII:

Indigenous Nations and Peoples around North America are experiencing the impacts of climate change in their communities and traditional lands. These include the disappearance of traditional subsistence foods, including wild game, fish, berries, wild plants and traditional food crops and plant medicines. Water levels are rising in coastal areas. Inland water tables, lakes, streams, rivers and springs are diminishing. Arctic sea ice is rapidly disappearing. New diseases affect the food chain and human health.

Clearly, climate change is violating Indigenous Peoples' rights to self-determination, peace and security, right to development, right to food, Treaty rights, cultural integrity, right to health and a range of other fundamental human rights, including many that are affirmed in the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Attempts by State Governments and corporations to respond to these critical issues have been woefully inadequate, often creating more problems than they solve. International cooperation and solidarity, taking into account the rights, perspectives and traditional understandings of Indigenous Peoples, as well as their full participation in ongoing international dialogues and policy developments, are essential to addressing the diverse challenges of climate change.

Based on these understandings and observations, participants strongly affirmed that effective solutions to climate change must take a rights-based approach, which recognizes and includes Indigenous Peoples' traditional knowledge systems. The full report lists a number of projects, programs and initiatives by Indigenous Peoples and local communities' in North America which are responses and solutions to climate change and global warming based on

traditional knowledge and practices. These are effective tools for mitigation, adaptation and resiliency and must be supported.

Participants affirmed the fundamental importance of Treaty rights to this discussion, underscoring the sacredness of our Treaties and the relationships they represent, based on our traditions, histories, laws, ceremonial ways and relationships with our lands.

Participants affirmed our sacred responsibility to institute a new form of energy economy, built on respect for the natural world, energy conservation, the implementation of energy efficiency and weatherization initiatives, and programs for the efficient use of clean, renewable energy in a way that supports our tribal self-sufficiency, sovereignty and traditional life ways.

Participants recognized that credible scientists and climate studies are urging a reduction in Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) emissions by 80% over the coming decade

Participants affirmed the dire need for Canada and the United States, as industrialized countries and major contributors to greenhouse gases, to adopt the most stringent, vigorous and aggressive CO₂ reduction plan in accordance with target dates established by the international community.

Participants recognized that Indigenous Peoples' vital expertise and perspectives have not been effectively included, and have often deliberately been marginalized, in previous and ongoing national, regional and global discussions on climate change.

Participants strongly affirmed that non-sustainable development activities, including mineral and fossil fuel extraction, deforestation, damming, uranium mining and milling, as well as the production of wastes and the proliferation of toxins, creates and exacerbates the growing impacts of climate change.

Participants recognized that many Indigenous Peoples from this region and around the world have called for a moratorium on new exploration for the extraction of oil, natural gas and coal within and near Indigenous lands, especially in environmentally, socially, culturally, historically and spiritually significant areas. Participants also affirmed article 32 of the *UN Declaration*, which upholds the right of FPIC for Indigenous Peoples in relation to all development activities affecting their lands, territories and resources, and article 3, which upholds the right of self-determination for Indigenous Peoples.

Participants expressed concern that Carbon trading mechanisms, including cap and trade, commodifies the earth's atmosphere, turning the earth's carbon-cycling capacity into property to be bought or sold in a global market, undermining the Earth's ability and capacity to support a climate conducive to life.

Participants expressed profound concerns about the causal factors and impacts of climate change on water security for Indigenous Peoples. They took note that in North America fossil fuel extractive industries, such as the tar sands extraction and similar activities, are

contaminating and depleting water levels. This threatens the health and water rights of communities and the ecosystems on which they depend.

Participants also expressed concern that many strategies being promoted for the mitigation of climate change in North America and around the world, including large scale agro-fuel (bio-fuel) production, carbon trading, cap and trade, carbon “sinks”, the World Bank’s “RED/REDD” initiative and other “market based approaches” have contributed to further environmental degradation and the violation of Indigenous Peoples’ rights.

The participants called upon the UNPFII7 to include the following recommendations in its final report:

- The UNPFII7 recommend to the Economic and Social Council and the Human Rights Council that the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples conduct a thematic study on climate change. The study should adopt a rights-based approach consistent with the *UN Declaration* and identify the impacts on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the corresponding obligations of States.
- The UNPFII7 recommend that the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) establish formal structures for full, direct and active participation of Indigenous Peoples within the official discussions and decision-making processes of the UNFCCC meetings.
- **The participants further called upon the UNPFII7 to request a meeting with the UNFCCC Secretariat and the Chair of the Permanent Forum to call upon them to provide the necessary support and funding to Indigenous Peoples from all regions (including North America) for their full and effective participation in all levels of discussion, decision-making and implementation, as well as support for community based initiatives. Our full report proposes a range of concrete mechanisms which can achieve this objective, and we invite the members of the UNPFII to take them into account in this regard.**

The Participants invited to the UNPFII, and recommend that the UNPFII maintain an ongoing list of “best practices”, resiliency solutions and strategies submitted by Indigenous Peoples and local communities as a resource for Indigenous Peoples around the world, and to formally recognize the range of important Declarations and initiatives by Indigenous Peoples around the world addressing the Climate Change Crisis.

And finally Madame Chair, the participants endorsed the full implementation by all states, including the US and Canada, of all provisions of the *UN Declaration*, including provisions relating to the right to FPIC, as an key solution-based approach to addressing the current climate crisis.

Thank you.