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**To the Fourth Session of UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
New York, 20 May 2005**

On behalf of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, home to the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, thank you for the opportunity to address this fourth session of the Forum. I am honoured also to serve as the coordinator of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples. And I wish to pay tribute to the High Commissioner for Human Rights for her work in coordinating the first Decade.

The first Decade produced several significant achievements, such as the creation of this Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues; the establishment of a Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples; and the evolution of various laws, policies, and institutions on indigenous issues at the national and international levels.

The launch this year of a Second Decade presents an opportunity to consolidate these achievements. Yet it also challenges us to identify and pursue any objectives that remain unfulfilled. An evaluation of the first Decade by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights revealed that, of the indigenous peoples' organizations that responded to a survey, only thirty-six percent noted positive changes in their communities over the past ten years. Forty-four percent said that they had not witnessed any improvements. A smaller percentage felt that their situation had worsened. Surveys conducted at the national level yielded a somewhat better picture. Fifty-two of the respondents observed positive change, while forty-four percent noted few or no positive changes. In short, the evaluation of the First Decade shows that much work remains to be done to ensure that indigenous peoples' lives are meaningfully improved. The General Assembly itself has already underscored the need for action-oriented programs for indigenous peoples.

The proclamation of the Second Decade in 2005 is propitious. This is a year of taking stock, as all Member States and the UN system prepare for the summit-level review this September of progress in implementing the Millennium Declaration. More than that, the 2005 to 2015 timeframe for the Second Decade coincides with that remaining for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. This means that the time is ripe for the international community—including the UN Permanent Forum and indigenous peoples—to devise a Comprehensive Program of Action for the Second Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

The Program could address key concerns of indigenous peoples in the area of development. One is the integration of their perspectives and their effective participation in development processes. Another is the development of specific indicators and disaggregated data beyond the national aggregates, in order accurately to assess their

socio-economic and cultural well being. Steps taken on either front would facilitate the formulation of appropriate policies and programs –policies and programs that ensure, at a minimum, that national development processes do not further marginalize indigenous peoples.

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs invited governments and indigenous organizations and nations to submit comments on the construction of a Comprehensive Program of Action for a Second Decade. The Forum's Secretariat received comments and recommendations from a variety of Member States, UN system entities, indigenous peoples' organizations, and regional consultations of indigenous peoples. On that basis, I would like to draw your attention to the primary proposals that have emerged regarding the key themes, objectives, and activities that could shape the Comprehensive Program of Action.

In the contributions received, two proposed themes predominated: one featuring the concept of partnership and the other, a human rights approach to development, centered on the concept of identity.

In other words, the Second Decade should strongly and consistently emphasize full partnership with indigenous peoples in the design and implementation of the Comprehensive Program of Action. And the Program itself should focus on development in terms of human rights and identity. It should advance a development approach that takes into account indigenous peoples' cultures and perspectives of self-determination; self-development; ownership of projects and programs; and their free, prior, and informed consent.

The proposals for the Program of Action's key objectives and activities fall into three main categories: (1) standard-setting, monitoring, and strategies and methods for implementation at the international and regional levels; (2) action-oriented programs to strengthen work at the nation level; and (3) capacity building.

The first category is standard-setting, monitoring, and strategies and methods for implementation at the international and regional levels.

In this area, a priority of the Second Decade should be to finalize the negotiations on the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and to secure its adoption early in the Decade. The draft should not incorporate standards that fall below the existing ones. Toward that end, some contributors have suggested retaining the 1994 text of the UN Sub-Commission for the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. Contributors also proposed activities to facilitate the Draft Declaration's adoption, such as establishing more dynamic methods for the Commission on Human Rights Working Group on the Draft Declaration. For instance, if an indigenous co-chair were appointed, she or he could organize expert seminars on contentious issues and prepare a foundation for their resolution. The seminars could address such issues as: self-determination; lands and resources; and the question of traditional knowledge in the context of intellectual property rights.

Increased and systematic focus should be given to implementing existing international standards and policies relating to indigenous and tribal peoples. That effort should include both the ratification of Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization, Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, and the strengthening of mechanisms to monitor the Convention's implementation. Where necessary, national constitutions should recognize the existence of indigenous peoples. Governments should also further develop national legislation for the protection and promotion of human rights, including means of monitoring and guaranteeing those rights.

Fundamentally, the Second Decade should emphasize improving the lives of indigenous peoples. In this area, and given the coincidence of the timeframes for the Second Decade and for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, the Decade's Program of Action should emphasize the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. Improved monitoring of the Goals' implementation will be central to this effort. That, in turn, will require the development and effective use of environmental, social, and human rights impact assessment methods that are sensitive to the realities of indigenous peoples. Monitoring performance in meeting the MDGs and other targets set toward the fundamental goal of improving the lives of indigenous peoples will be an important task of the UN's Economic and Social Council, which should hold a mid-term and end-term review of progress in the Second Decade.

In order to ensure greater inclusion of indigenous issues and encourage indigenous participants in decision-making on cross-cutting issues of importance, decisions on the goals of the Second Decade must take into account both the relevant goals of concurrent UN Decades –such as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development– and relevant world programs.

The Decade's Program of Action should incorporate the work of the Permanent Forum in its mandated areas. In turn, the Forum's Secretariat should appoint a focal point for monitoring the Program of Action. The Forum and its Secretariat should be further strengthened through financial, human, and technical resources – not least to enable the Forum effectively to monitor the activities of the Second Decade.

During the Second Decade, States, donor agencies, international organizations, and others should be encouraged to contribute to the two Voluntary Funds established by the General Assembly: the Trust Fund in Support of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Voluntary Fund for the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

The second category of proposals for the Decade's Program of Action deals with action-oriented programs to strengthen work at the national level.

Focal points should be designated at the country level by UN agencies, funds, and programs with country offices, with a mandate to follow up on the implementation of the Permanent Forum's recommendations and the Decade's objectives. Governments should also promote national focal points on indigenous issues and intensify coordination and

communication at the national level among relevant ministries, agencies, and local authorities.

Tripartite committees could be established at the country level –composed of Governments, indigenous peoples, and UN country offices– to implement the Decade’s objectives. The Forum itself should initiate meetings in which indigenous peoples, Governments, and the UN country teams can exchange experiences with national institutions at the country level. In the process, the Forum could apply lessons learned from previous experiences in establishing and running such national committees.

Systematizing data collection and disaggregation initiatives is a high priority. Technical resources should be provided to national information systems to produce reliable statistics. The work and studies of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean can serve as an example in developing more coherent systems for data collection with respect to indigenous peoples at the national level.

The final set of proposals for the Program of Action deals with capacity building.

A program of education on the human rights of indigenous peoples should be developed, in collaboration with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples.

Information sharing on indigenous issues between UN agencies, charter bodies, and treaty bodies needs to be systemized further. In an effort to systematize and build capacity, all agencies, funds, and programs with regional offices should designate regional focal points, with a mandate to follow up on the implementation of the Forum’s recommendations and the Decade’s objectives. UNDP’s Regional Program on Indigenous Peoples in Asia should be further strengthened; and its other Regional Bureaus should also develop such programs.

These are some of the key themes, objectives, and activities proposed thus far for the Second Decade. Copies of a report detailing the comments received by the Forum’s Secretariat will be made available next week. I look forward to your discussions within this Forum regarding the contents of the Program of Action. Following the session, my Department will prepare a draft and circulate it broadly among all concerned, and of course the Permanent Forum for comments, in order to enable me to assist the Secretary-General in submitting to the General Assembly next Fall a Comprehensive Program of Action for the Second International Decade of the World’s Indigenous Peoples.

Let me conclude by reiterating that we must seize the opportunities with which we are presented this session –and this year– to ensure a Second Decade of meaningful action-oriented programs and specific projects that markedly improve the lives of indigenous peoples within their communities and that help us to ensure that indigenous peoples benefit from the global effort towards the Millennium Development Goals. As Coordinator of the Decade, I look forward to working with you closely and energetically to promote its success.