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**7<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on  
Indigenous Issues  
United Nations Headquarters, New York  
21 April - 2 May 2008**

**Item 8 (b): Second International Decade of the World's  
Indigenous People**

**Statement by the 2008 indigenous fellows of the OHCHR on  
the Indigenous Fellowship Programme**

Thank you Madam Chairperson, members of the Permanent Forum, distinguished delegates, brothers and sisters. I am Jane Naini Meriwas and I come from the Samburu people in Kenya. I am here today with my colleagues who are from the Lisu people of Thailand, the Boro of Northeast India, the Wisconsin Oneida of the U.S., and the Gurung of Nepal. We are participants in the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights 2008 Indigenous Fellowship Programme. We are here speaking to you under item 8 (b) because our fellowship was created in the context of the First International Decade of the World's Indigenous People following General Assembly resolution 50/157.

The Indigenous Fellowship Programme was officially launched in 1997 and is currently composed of four linguistic components: English, Spanish, French, and Russian. The Spanish-speaking fellows are also present at the Forum today, and many former fellows are here as well. Since its inception, the Indigenous Fellowship Programme has benefited 128 indigenous representatives from nearly 50 countries, representing all regions of the world: Asia, the Pacific, Europe, Latin America, Africa, and North America.

My four colleagues and I have the privilege to spend four months training at the OHCHR in Geneva, learning how to use the UN system and mechanisms to defend the rights of our people. Our training includes many visits to agencies such as the International Labour Organization, UNESCO, WIPO, UNDP, UNITAR, and of course, we were fortunate enough to receive funding to attend this Forum.

Through our fellowship programme, we gain international knowledge as human rights defenders. Some past fellows have also undertaken additional internships and consultancies with various UN offices and specialized agencies to gain practical experience, and others have accepted leadership positions in their organizations. These opportunities

enhance the knowledge that an individual receives as a fellow, and also reinforces the expertise of UN agencies on indigenous issues. The vast majority of fellows have returned home to continue their grassroots work empowered with knowledge of international indigenous human rights.

The UN General Assembly Resolution 59/174 proclaims the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. Article 47 of the Programme of Action states, quote, "*programmes of education on the human rights of indigenous peoples should be developed and strengthened, including the current Indigenous Fellowship Programme of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.*"

Considering this mandate to strengthen the Indigenous Fellowship Programme, the current fellows, thinking of the future generations, ask the Permanent Forum to please consider the following requests during the Second International Decade for the World's Indigenous People:

1. That the Indigenous Fellowship Programme is provided with increased funding and support to allow more individuals the rare opportunity to participate in this training, and further, that this training is complemented by additional internships and/or consultancies with UN offices or other specialized agencies in order to gain hands-on experience.
2. That the Permanent Forum participate in the promotion of the Indigenous Fellowship Programme through both disseminating information and allocating funds to guarantee the attendance of indigenous fellows at this Forum each year.

Last, but certainly not least, we would like to express our deep gratitude for having the opportunity to participate in this fellowship programme and for being able to attend this Forum to speak to you today. We are indeed honoured to be present at this historic gathering: the first session of the Permanent Forum since the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Our presence here as young human rights defenders is the direct result of decades-long struggles on behalf of Indigenous Peoples. We are here because of the hard work of those who came before us and with the valuable training that we are receiving, we indigenous fellows will return home more equipped to continue this work. We hope that the Permanent Forum will see to it that more people enjoy these opportunities.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.