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**Statement to the 22nd session of the
Working Group on Indigenous
Populations**



Geneva, 19 July 2004

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The World Health Organization is pleased to have the opportunity to address the 22nd session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations. We note that the activities of both the Working Group and the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues have done much to advance the cause of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. Set against the backdrop of the International Decade of Indigenous Populations, the Working Group has emerged as a focal point of international action on indigenous issues.

In this context, we would like to highlight some of our ongoing activities which may be of particular interest to this Working Group.

First, our Health Equity and Human Rights teams have been jointly working on a data analysis process which should provide a means for considering health disparities among ethnic groups. The main objective is to analyze disparities in health on the basis of ethnic/indigenous affiliation, based on data from 64 countries (34 from the World Health Survey and 37 with Demographic and Health Surveys; 7 countries appear in both data sets) The data analysis will result in a publication that will highlight the health situation of marginalized ethnic population groups, including indigenous and tribal peoples, from a human rights perspective. In other words, it will use the normative framework of human rights to consider health disparities as constituting lack of fulfilment or denial of health rights of these population groups.

Second, WHO proposes to establish a Commission on the social determinants of health. The Commission will assemble relevant evidence on the social factors that lead to widespread ill-health in disadvantaged communities. But most important, it will spearhead a political advocacy process to drive change. The Commission's overarching goal is to increase vulnerable people's chances to be healthy by promoting a core policy emphasis on the social determinants of health in countries, at WHO, and among global health actors. To reach its aims, the Commission will emphasize the political aspects of public health improvement. At the same time, it will "put faces" on policies, offering a forum for encounter, learning, critique and collaboration among public health scientists, policymakers and community representatives.

The WHO looks forward to the activities of this Working Group and to the opportunity to hear the perspectives of indigenous peoples and their communities and organizations. We are pleased to collaborate with other UN agencies, and in particular indigenous representatives themselves, in advancing the health and human rights of indigenous populations.

Thank you.