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By: Ambassador Johan C. Verbeke (Belgium)
Vice - President of ECOSOC

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Opening statement on behalf of the President of ECOSOC

UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
(Fourth session)

16 May 2005, 11:30 AM

Excellencies,
Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address, on behalf of the President of the Economic and Social Council, the Fourth Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. I am truly pleased to see the progress and development of the Permanent Forum as a new body of the Council to raise awareness on indigenous issues, develop expert recommendations, and play a coordination role within the UN system.

In its first three years of work, the Permanent Forum has significantly increased the visibility of indigenous issues at the international level as is evidenced, among other things, by the broad participation of governments, indigenous representatives, the intergovernmental system, and civil society at large, as well as the regular presence of the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly, and the President of ECOSOC. The Permanent Forum has become the foremost body for dialogue between indigenous peoples, the UN system and states. It has also created a valuable space for cooperation with the intergovernmental system through its comprehensive recommendations in all the areas of its mandate.

The focus of the Fourth Session on the Millennium Development Goals is a commendable strategic decision of the Permanent Forum. Evidence points to the fact that the majority of approximately 370 million indigenous peoples of the world today face extreme poverty and have no access to education or inadequate education or no access to bilingual primary education in both the dominant language and the mother tongue. It is imperative to understand the concerns of indigenous peoples and to integrate their

perspectives in the MDG implementation and review process. Without this, we will not be able to meaningfully reach the targets that have been laid out for the achievement of these goals. .

As you convene over the next two weeks to discuss the first two goals of the Millennium Declaration: “Eradication of Extreme Poverty and Hunger,” and “Achieving Universal Primary Education”, I wish to assure you of the significance of the outcomes of this Fourth Session, and of their dissemination to the upcoming High Level Segment of the Economic and Social Council from 29 June to 1 July. The theme of the High Level Segment will be “Achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, as well as implementing the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits: progress made, challenges and opportunities.” The High Level Segment of ECOSOC, together with the Coordination Segment, will further constitute a major input in to the high-level review by the General Assembly of the progress made in the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, including the internationally agreed development goals and partnerships required for their achievement.

In preparation for the June High-Level Segment, the Economic and Social Council held a two day preparatory meeting on 16 and 17 March 2005. Various UN agencies, funds and programmes organized seven roundtables, which focused on the MDGs, and I was very pleased to see the active participation of the UN Permanent Forum Member, Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, in the Roundtable on Eradication of Extreme Poverty and Hunger. Ms. Tauli-Corpuz provided valuable input on how indigenous peoples can be meaningfully included in the MDG process.

From discussions held to-date, it is clear that indigenous peoples should be made visible in the MDG Reports, in reports of intergovernmental bodies, as well as other relevant reports. Disaggregated data should be developed so that the situation of indigenous peoples becomes clearer and their problems addressed. Indigenous peoples

should not be forgotten nor harmed during the MDG process, but be participants and partners in this extraordinary process of our era.

I wish you every success in your deliberations and I look forward to receiving the report and recommendations that will emerge from the Fourth Session of the Permanent Forum.