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UNITAR REGIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMME TO ENHANCE THE CONFLICT PREVENTION AND PEACEBUILDING CAPACITIES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PACIFIC

The UNITAR Regional Training Programme to Enhance the Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Capacities of Indigenous Peoples' Representatives of the Pacific provided advanced training in conflict analysis, negotiation and resolution to indigenous representatives from Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. The programme has been designed to respond to the urgent need, and request for, this kind of ongoing training programme at the regional level, and to develop the capacity of indigenous peoples working on these issues to build constructive, lasting, working relationships with governments and other stakeholders, with regional organizations, and the United Nations.

Senior indigenous representatives and resource persons from the Pacific had indicated that the Pacific is one of the most marginalized regions in the world and that indigenous peoples in the Pacific--for geographical reasons and due to resource constraints-- were among the most neglected. They accordingly requested UNITAR make this training programme available in the Pacific region so that their colleagues coming from throughout this vast area could build their capacities to resolve conflict in a constructive and sustainable manner.

Thirty-one indigenous representatives, including seventeen women (composing 55% of participants) from throughout the Pacific region participated in the training programme. Participants included human rights advocates; representatives of indigenous governance structures; managers of peacebuilding and reconciliation projects; an advisor to the Parliamentary Select Committee of the Autonomous Government of Bougainville; heads of national and regional women's organizations; managers of peace, disarmament and decolonization programmes of a Pacific regional centre; coordinators of development, land and environmental rights organizations; heads of national and regional NGO networks; health advisors, environmental advocates and others working to improve

the quality of life for their communities and peoples.

The training programme took place in August 2007 in Canberra, Australia. Funding for the programme was provided by the Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, the Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. UNITAR is very grateful for this support which made this first requested regional training programme for the Pacific region possible. We also appreciate the work of the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre which organized the local and regional arrangements for the training.

In order to ensure the relevance of the training to the needs of those participating, the programme was designed with indigenous leaders from the region, to address issues and priorities of importance to indigenous peoples, with a particular emphasis on some of the key issues faced in Pacific.

Sessions and case studies were held, for example, on identity issues in conflict, on establishing the groundwork for cooperation and partnership: negotiating with governments and the private sector, and negotiating with extractive industries.

The majority of resource persons for the programme were indigenous experts from Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. These included a former Government Minister and International Spokesperson for the Melanesian Institute of Philosophy, Science and Technology from Vanuatu; a senior lecturer on Maori Business at the Victoria University of Wellington from New Zealand; and we were very pleased to have Rapporteur and Member of the UN Permanent Forum from the Pacific, Professor Mick Dodson, serve as a resource person for the regional training. We also appreciate the reports provided by Mr. Tom Calma the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner of Australia which were included in the handbook of materials provided to each participant in the regional training.

Other speakers included the incoming UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous Peoples, Professor Jim Anaya, and an African academic leader and conflict resolution practitioner. Two very senior indigenous participants from Bougainville were invited to present on their peacebuilding and governance work.

Participants found the programme very relevant and directly applicable to their work and urged UNIFAR to continue to make this capacity-building programme available to indigenous leaders both internationally, for those participating in UN and international processes and structures, and regionally for those representatives working at local, national and regional levels for the peaceful resolution of conflict. Thank you.