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***"NGO in Special Consultative Status with
the Economic and Social Council of the UN"
Victoria Tauli Corpuz***

Agenda Item 4(a)

20 Years of Achievement of WGIP and Visions for the Future

Among the many achievements of the WGIP I think the most significant is that it provided a space for us, indigenous peoples to tell the international community our stories. It was here where we confirmed that, in spite of the diversities we have between us, we had similar accounts about how our territories were plundered and militarized and how we have been systematically discriminated against in law and in practice by states and the dominant society. Had it not been for these stories which were retold time and again in these halls for the past twenty years, the gains we have achieved so far, would not have happened.

The stories we told, however, were not just about our travails and woes. We also talked about our hopes, our visions of a transformed world, and our proposals on how to get there. It was here where the idea for another permanent forum for indigenous peoples in the UN was conceived. I agree with you Mr. Chairman, that for all intents and purposes, the WGIP is a permanent forum for indigenous peoples and it should remain to be such. When we talked and worked for the creation of a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples which later on became PF on Indigenous Issues, it was never intended to replace the WGIP.

The view of some representatives of States is that we should close down the WGIP because the Permanent Forum has been established; because the UN does not have enough resources to sustain two or three bodies dealing with indigenous peoples or because the WGIP has outlived its purpose. I think the WGIP cannot outlive its mandate and purpose because up to this very second human rights violations against indigenous peoples continue. In fact, in many places this has even intensified because of the desire of states and corporations to grab and exploit the last remaining natural resources, many of which are still found in indigenous peoples' territories.

International and national legally binding standards to protect our rights as distinct peoples are not yet in place, except for ILO Convention 169. Even a soft instrument, like the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, can hardly pass the eye of a needle in the CHR Working Group to Elaborate on a Draft Declaration.

The prevailing situation tells us that we still need the WGIP. My organization fully supports the proposals set forth in the Indigenous Peoples' Caucus Statement

presented yesterday by my colleague, Joji Carino. I would like to reinforce some of the points raised in that statement.

The WGIP is still the only UN body which has the mandate to set standards for indigenous peoples. The Permanent Forum does not have this mandate. My organization thinks that its role should be further strengthened to enable the WGIP to monitor how the rights of indigenous peoples, as defined in the Draft Declaration, are being promoted by States. It could facilitate the preparation of reports, whether on a regional or thematic basis, which will describe how the various rights are being promoted or violated. The various experts of the WGIP can work in partnership with the indigenous organizations in their regions to produce annual regional reports which can be presented at the WGIP sessions and the Commission on Human Rights. This can complement the work of the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous Peoples.

The value added here is that it will not just be one report by the Special Rapporteur which will come out. It will be regional reports which will fully address the specificities obtaining in a particular region. Another new feature is that this will not be done only by the experts of the UN but done in partnership or collaboration with indigenous organizations and NGOs. We, indigenous peoples have come a long way from just coming here to complain. We are developing our own expertise in doing research and documentation and publishing on issues closest to us. We are already active in articulating our own analysis, views and positions on various issues as seen in the position papers, statements and declarations we come up with in various processes. We have sophisticated levels of networking from the local to the global arenas, among us and between us and other peoples' networks and even with academic institutions.

What I can imagine is that the WGIP will be releasing reports like the Amnesty International Reports. However, this will be specific to indigenous peoples. These reports can then be used as the basis for strengthening the standard setting mandate of the WGIP. On the basis of the findings and conclusions standards on most sensitive areas can be further elaborated. These reports can also facilitate the access and use by indigenous peoples of the grievance mechanisms within the United Nations. To be able to come up with these reports, massive training activities will be undertaken for both indigenous peoples and governments.

It will be a shame of our generation if we allow indigenous peoples rights to be blatantly violated and no decisive actions are taken both nationally and internationally. The WGIP has to continue its mandate of setting standards for indigenous peoples but this time in closer partnership with us. The human rights discourse and practice has undoubtedly been enriched by the work of the WGIP. This has been a result of the partnership between the UN, indigenous peoples, support NGOs, and some governments. Let us continue to strengthen this collaboration and let us transform the WGIP to be the nexus of this partnership.