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PERMANENT MISSION OF CUBA TO THE UNITED NATIONS  
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**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR RODOLFO BENÍTEZ VERNON, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF CUBA, AT THE TENTH SESSION OF THE UN PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES, UNDER ITEM 4a) *Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.* New York, 18 May 2011.**

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Mr. Chairman,

For too long, the voice of indigenous peoples was silenced at the international level by the darkness of intolerance and oblivion.

When in the 1920s, Native Americans addressed the League of Nations, they were received with indifference. The same situation continued for many years, even after the creation of the United Nations Organization.

We have come a long way. Now we have various mechanisms within the UN system, including this Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which has the high responsibility to support the struggle for the legitimate rights of the over 5,000 indigenous peoples existing in 70 countries worldwide.

Cuba rejects all doctrines, policies and practices based on the superiority of certain peoples, and we condemn them strongly as racist, scientifically false, legally invalid, morally condemnable, and socially unjust.

We uphold the right of all peoples, including indigenous peoples, to be different, to consider themselves different, and to be respected as such.

Indigenous peoples are diverse, but all of them share something important; a terrible record of injustices.

For centuries, they have suffered discrimination, violence, plunder, and dispossession of their wealth and rights. They have been decimated, tortured and enslaved; stripped of their land and resources, their languages, their cultures, and their forms of government.

In the case of Cuba, the slaughter of the indigenous population as a consequence of colonization was of such magnitude, that it resulted in the extermination of our native peoples.

However, the cultural heritage of our natives could not be exterminated, and has been a significant factor in the process of forming the Cuban nation.

The strong vocation of the Cuban people for independence and sovereignty has its roots in the struggles of our natives. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Guamá, an indigenous chief, staged a more-than-10-year heavy battle against the colonizers, whose rifles he

confronted with macanas (cudgels), bows and arrows. His name is listed among those who, since quite early in our history, decided to sacrifice everything rather than giving in.

Mr. Chairman,

The adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 constituted a historical victory in the fight of these peoples for recognition of their ancient rights.

Nonetheless, the Declaration is not an end in itself. It marks a new stage in our efforts on the effective recognition of and respect for the rights of the more than 370 million natives worldwide, which account for over 5% of the world population, particularly their right to keep their own institutions, cultures and spiritual traditions, without suffering on racist and discriminatory grounds.

Results have been attained in the implementation of the Declaration, but there is still a long road ahead. For example, there is an urgent need for actions guaranteeing indigenous peoples the right to possess and use their land and resources. There are few countries that recognize the rights of indigenous peoples to land.

We must meet the five objectives constituting the framework for the activities of this Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples, in line with the guidelines established by the Convention No. 169 of the ILO and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Mr. Chairman,

The UN must play an important role in the practical actions aimed at remedying the discriminatory and rapacious treatment suffered by indigenous peoples for over five centuries.

Therefore, Cuba welcomes the adoption last year of Resolution 65/198, in which the General Assembly decided to hold, in 2014, the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

As wisely expressed by comrade Evo Morales, the first indigenous President in the history of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, native peoples and their philosophy on life constitute the moral reserve of the humankind.

Cuba will continue to firmly support the just demands of indigenous peoples for the effective realization of their rights and their free exercise.

Thank you