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Permanent Forum on
Indigenous Issues
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STATEMENT

BY

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ON BEHALF OF THE NORDIC COUNTRIES
(DENMARK, FINLAND, ICELAND, SWEDEN AND NORWAY)

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Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Members of the Forum,
Excellencies,
Indigenous and governmental representatives,

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, upon your election to preside over this historical first session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

It is a great honour and privilege for me to address the first session of the Permanent Forum on behalf of the Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and my own country, Norway.

The establishment of the Permanent Forum constitutes a landmark development in the international recognition of indigenous peoples. It is marked as one of the most important objectives of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. The achievement of this goal is warmly welcomed by the Nordic countries.

This first session of the Permanent Forum is a historical event and indicative of the progress achieved in the United Nations' work on indigenous rights. The process leading to the establishment of the Forum was long and cumbersome, and often paved with obstacles. These problems were resolved through a common desire to establish a forum where indigenous peoples and governments could meet, and discuss on an equal basis. When we gather here today, the past difficulties fade away, and we look forward to working together and facing the challenges ahead.

We strongly believe that this body of experts, with both indigenous as well as governmental members, has the capacity to achieve great and tangible results through a continuous and close dialogue with indigenous peoples, governments and United Nations bodies and agencies. It has the potential to further develop our understanding of the many problems and challenges in the field of indigenous rights, and to indicate possible and sustainable solutions to any problems.

The mandate of the Forum is sufficiently broad to enable it to address all issues affecting indigenous peoples, which fall within the mandate of its parent body, the Economic and Social Council. Indigenous peoples around the world face many difficult problems. It is thus natural that indigenous peoples have great expectations in the future work of the Forum. The Nordic countries share this view, and attach great importance and expectation to the Forum, and would like to see it develop into a powerful and effective body that can fully meet all these expectations.

Mr. Chairman,

We believe that the Forum needs time, but above all the resources to enable it to address these hopes and expectations. We are sure that you will all agree that necessary and adequate financial resources are a pre-requisite for the efficient functioning of the Forum, as it will be unable to fulfil its mandate otherwise.

We wish to point out that no allocations were made for the Permanent Forum in the current bi-annual budget of the UN. Voluntary contributions to enable the Forum to function, albeit at a minimum level, for the remainder of the present biannual period, are thus of urgent importance.

However, it is fundamental that in the future necessary funds are allocated for the work of the Forum from the regular budget of the United Nations.

Mr. Chairman,

Another fundamental criterion for the success of the Forum is the question of a permanent Secretariat for the Forum. We will need to secure regular funding for this, and to consider where this Secretariat should be placed in the UN system. We believe that the Forum could have a separate Secretariat closely linked to the ECOSOC Secretariat, staffed by highly competent persons, with due consideration being given to recruiting qualified indigenous professionals. We also encourage relevant UN agencies to consider providing the Secretariat with additional staff through secondment of staff members. We are convinced that a Secretariat will be established soon, and that it will reflect the broad mandate of the Forum. The Forum's advice on the issue of the Secretariat would greatly assist the decision-making related to this question.

We welcome the inter-agency efforts to enhance co-operation between UN agencies on indigenous issues through close co-operation with the Permanent Forum, as such co-operation and co-ordination is crucial for the success of the Forum.

We also wish to encourage indigenous peoples to actively participate in the work of the Forum. We regard their active involvement as vital for the legitimacy and comprehensive working of the Forum.

Mr Chairman,

The Nordic countries are eager to hear the views of the Members of the Permanent Forum on future priorities of the Forum, in particular on the following issues:

- how to develop the access and participation of indigenous peoples in the decision-making processes within the UN family on issues affecting them;
- how to raise the awareness and promote the integration and co-ordination of activities relating to indigenous issues within the UN system;
- how the Forum can contribute to the enhancement of sustainable development. This is particularly relevant since indigenous peoples have a special relationship to the land and natural resources of the area in which they live as the foundation for a distinctive culture and way of life.

In closing, we would like to emphasize that when elaborating issues related to indigenous peoples, a rights based approach is required. The rights of indigenous women and children demand special attention since they are often subjected to multiple discrimination. The UN Special Session on Children held last week makes it particularly timely to emphasize the situation of the indigenous children in the world. We would like to draw the attention of the Permanent Forum to the outcome document which includes many important commitments relating to indigenous children.

Thank you.