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Revised Statement: Address to Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
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Agenda item: 6
Education and Culture

Mister Chairman, Members of the Permanent Forum, Distinguished Delegates and Guests,
Indigenous Brothers and Sisters

Traditional Greeting

I give thanks to Creator and all of the elders and ancestors who have brought us together here. I give thanks to the Nation whose land this meeting is being held on and I ask for guidance in speaking these words in a good way. I bring greetings from my Nation, the Anishinabe (Ojibwa) people of Alderville First Nation. I am also here as a representative of the Toronto District School Board, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, the Canadian Teachers' Federation and Education International, a global educational organization that represents 25 million educators, including Indigenous teachers, in 155 countries and territories around the world www.ei-ie.org. I would like to offer my congratulations to you Mister Chairman, on your election and to all of the members of the Permanent Forum. Thank you for working on behalf of Indigenous peoples. I would also like to offer congratulations to our Indigenous brothers and sisters from East Timor on gaining their independence from Indonesia. Our thoughts and prayers are with those who gave their lives that this could be so.

From my perspective as an Indigenous person and teacher, there are some critical issues concerning education and culture that need to be addressed at this Forum.

- 1) The first and most critical issue is self determination for the Indigenous Peoples. It means the right to be indigenous, the right to have our lands, to hunt and fish, to have access and use of natural resources and to participate fully in any decision making process related to our development.
- 2) The second issue is the approval of Indigenous Draft Declaration which must be a priority. We must also remember that this Draft Declaration does not give us our rights. Creator gave us our rights. We must continue to demand to exercise those rights and to be treated as sovereign nations, nothing less is acceptable.
- 3) The third issue relates to the importance of education for all peoples. According to Article 14 of the Draft Declaration of Indigenous Rights "Indigenous peoples have the right to all levels and forms of education. They also have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own language." In Dakar in 2000, the World Forum on Education drafted a declaration to achieve Education for All by 2015. Advances have taken place in urban areas but much more needs to be done in rural areas, especially in Indigenous communities. Further exploration of the community-based approach is essential in order to achieve more inclusive education in Indigenous schools and other educational programmes. Social-economical adjustment programs, debts and the trend towards privatization of schools diminishes the state's role in protecting basic education. This is a threat to providing basic education for all and

- teachers' labour rights. Member states and UN bodies must review, transform and improve policies and practices in order to assure Education for All.
- 4) The fourth issue is the extinction of Indigenous languages. The language is a medium for transmitting culture from the past to the present and into the future. Ojibwa elder Mary Lou Fox once said "Without the language, we are warm bodies without a spirit." Immersion programmes are needed to reverse the loss of language that has occurred due to colonization. Our Indigenous languages should be given the same official status in our countries as the languages of the colonizers. Member states and UN bodies must implement policies and practices that promote protection, transmission, maintenance and preservation of indigenous languages because they are the best way to teach indigenous knowledge and values.
 - 5) The fifth issue relates to the need for more Indigenous teachers. Indigenous teachers play a key role in good education. Their work must be recognized, supported, fully compensated and improved by providing adequate resources, professional development opportunities and good working conditions. Indigenous peoples and member states' governments must encourage and provide incentives to promote teaching as a career for Indigenous peoples.

What can we, as indigenous people, do?

Indigenous peoples must improve and strengthen our organizations and our level of participation in order to share our knowledge within our communities, and with government and institutions at regional, national and global levels.. We need strong partnerships and strong voices to be heard within and outside of this Permanent Forum, on all matters of importance to Indigenous people. In 2001, The World Congress of Education International was held in Jomtien, Thailand. I was very disappointed that very few indigenous educators were at the Indigenous Forum held there. We need a much stronger Indigenous presence at the next World Congress to be held in 2004 in Costa Rica in order to achieve any further progress on Indigenous education issues. The World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education, www.fnahec.org/wipce2002/ being held Aug 4 to 10 near Calgary Alberta will be another excellent opportunity for developing networks and sharing. We intend to propose the formation of a Global Indigenous Voice on Education (GIVE) networking website at that conference subject to funding. We have more information on this and the work of Education International for those people who are interested.

In closing, the goals of the Permanent Forum will succeed with the active participation of all Indigenous peoples and real commitments by member states, indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations. We salute Ecuador, New Zealand and the Metis Nation of Canada for pledging concrete support to the success of this Permanent Forum. We are confident that many others will follow their example!

Education International already has the organization and partnerships in place ready to provide assistance and action to support the work of this Permanent Forum and indigenous people around the world. We pledge our support and we look forward to working in partnership with the Permanent Forum, UN agencies, member states and especially Indigenous communities, in order to achieve our goals.

Thank you Mister Chairman, Miigwetch

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