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**Closing remarks of Mr Johan Scholvinck to the Seventh Session of the  
UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
2 May 2008**

Madam Chairperson,  
Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous,  
Distinguished representatives of Member States, Indigenous Peoples, the United Nations  
system and other inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and  
academic institutions,

It gives me great pleasure to be here with you today to witness the end of a most  
productive session of the Permanent Forum. These halls of the United Nations see some  
of their most lively and vibrant days when the Permanent Forum holds its annual sessions  
here, one of the two largest UN meetings.

Indeed, this Forum is a tribute to and a celebration of the world's cultural diversity.  
Coming from all parts of the world, Permanent Forum members and the other participants  
engage in debates on some of the most complex issues in our societies. Entering into  
dialogues, exchanging experiences, learning and, most importantly, building together,  
step by step, a more just world, where the human rights of all peoples and all persons are  
respected and where the indigenous visions of development are really heard.

Madam Chairperson,

Your session this year enjoyed extremely rich **participation**: more than 1700 participants  
from indigenous peoples' organizations, NGOs, academia participated, some 30 UN  
system and other inter-governmental organizations, about 70 Member States and some 30  
indigenous parliamentarians from around the world.

The Permanent Forum, provides fertile ground for a tri-partite partnership: its  
constituencies encompass indigenous peoples, states and the UN as well as other inter-  
governmental organizations. The Forum therefore provides a unique and creative  
opportunity to make progress *together*—and I stress, *together*.

Your rich debates, I know, extended from early in the morning till late at night, in this  
and other conference rooms, in the more than 60 side events that took place during the  
session, in the caucuses and the innumerable bilateral meetings.

I would like to congratulate all for this intense and democratic engagement. First of all, I  
would like to congratulate all the members of the Permanent Forum for the  
statesmanship, creativity and commitment with which they have carried out their mandate  
during this session.

Allow me, Madame Chairperson, to pay a special tribute today, on behalf of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, to Mrs Qin Xiaomei, Member of the Permanent Forum from the Peoples' Republic of China, for her extraordinary contribution to the work of the Permanent Forum during her six years as a Member. Mrs Qin is indeed leaving a most distinguished mark on the work of this Forum during its first formative years.

Our thanks go to all the indigenous representatives who came from the seven indigenous socio-cultural regions to participate actively in the Permanent Forum, bringing their concerns, visions and proposals.

We also thank the members of the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples Issues for their substantive involvement and unwavering support to the Permanent Forum.

I want to pay tribute to the active engagement of Member States, whose wisdom to create a special expert body as the Permanent Forum exemplifies a visionary approach in international affairs.

The NGO community again provided its friendship to the UN and its solidarity to indigenous peoples by supporting this important process in many unique ways, without which this meeting could not be as successful.

Despite its small size, the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum has serviced this meeting with exemplary effectiveness. I wish to recognize all the staff, and, today, in particular the extraordinary contribution of Ms Mirian Masaquiza, member of the secretariat, who has served the Forum with an excellence that honours the international civil service. The deep commitment of all the secretariat staff to the ideals of the United Nations, the mandate of this Forum and the cause of social justice for indigenous peoples is most commendable.

I regret therefore that extraneous comments were made yesterday by one person attempting to offend United Nations staff members discharging their official functions. Such behaviour is outside the parameters of this international parliamentary process and is totally unacceptable.

Madame Chairperson,

**The substantive output of the session is indeed commendable. Some highlights include the following:**

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The Forum's recommendations under the session's **main theme "Climate change, bio-cultural diversity and livelihoods: the stewardship role of indigenous peoples and new challenges"** have strongly promoted the participation of indigenous peoples, who contribute the "smallest ecological footprints" on Earth, in all future negotiations on climate change as well as their protection from mitigation measures that may have

adverse effects on their livelihoods and their future as peoples. The Forum urged all parties to consider alternative systems beyond the perpetuation of highly-centralized fossil-fuel-based energy supplies and large-scale bioenergy and hydropower dams. The Forum also called for an increased support for renewable, low-carbon and decentralized systems and recommended that States abandon old, centralized electricity grids, which are not suitable for the challenges of climate change.

The Forum expressed its profound concern about serious violations of **human rights** of indigenous peoples around the world and also extended its support to Bolivia and the incoming Government of Paraguay towards their efforts to end the slavery-like conditions of the Guarani people in the Chaco region of Latin America.

Given that the seventh session was the first after the adoption of the **UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**, the Forum has decided to take a leading role on the promotion of the implementation of the Declaration. It has decided to hold an international expert group meeting before the eighth session to formulate concrete proposals.

Following a meeting it held in Siberia in July last year, the Permanent Forum also decided to appoint **Special Rapporteurs among its members to study the impact of corporations on indigenous peoples** and promote indigenous peoples' rights within this context.

As a result of its regional focus this year on the **Pacific region**, which is comprised largely of small island states, the traditional lands of many indigenous peoples, the Forum has issued comprehensive recommendations on a variety of sectors, including climate change, and underlined the need for increased attention by UN bodies and the UN system.

Following a half-day discussion on **indigenous languages**, the Permanent Forum issued recommendations intended to raise the prestige of indigenous languages, including through supporting efforts towards standardization, establishing indigenous universities and promoting the use of indigenous languages in public administration.

**In a methodological shift**, the Forum has decided to alternate between policy years and follow-up years and to annually examine in depth the work of six UN agencies. At **next year's session**, follow up discussion will be devoted to economic and social development, indigenous women, and the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. The regional focus will be on the Arctic. The implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples will be a standing item. The special theme for 2010 (policy year) will be "Indigenous Peoples' development with culture and identity: Articles 3 and 23 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples".

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Madam Chairperson,

[After the end of this meeting, after we all say our “good-byes” and the Permanent Forum members and all the observers leave this room, a *new and reinvigorated cycle of work begins for all of us*. The Permanent Forum is not just an event. The efforts during the sessions here are not just words that are meant to be spoken and the forgotten. The Secretariat here at Headquarters, the agencies, governments and indigenous peoples’ and other organizations, academics, journalists, each one of us, actors in this effort, will go back to our agency, our region, our country, and continue the work.]

The Forum’s session, with its intensity, its robust debates and its thoughtful conclusions, is a tribute to our human efforts of partnership. It has offered us all the opportunity to learn from each other, to get inspiration and strength from one another. It has renewed our commitment to struggle under the UN Charter in order to realize peace, development and human rights for and with the indigenous peoples of the world.

In closing, I would like to wish each and everyone of you a safe trip home and we look forward to welcoming you again at the seventh session of the Permanent Forum next year.