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Introductory Statement of the Chairperson of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on Agenda Item 2, Millennium Development Goal 1

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The Forum showed vision by decisively selecting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as the cross-cutting themes for the next couple of years, in order to ensure that the institutional and funding pillars include indigenous peoples, their visions and perspectives.

As you are all aware, nearly five years have passed since world leaders adopted the Millennium Declaration, and the MDGs as part of their commitment to eradicate poverty and promote human rights, democracy, and respect for nature. While it has become clear in United Nations development methodologies that data disaggregation is crucial so that policies may be more effectively targeted to the most marginalized parts of the population in every country, inadequate progress has been made in practice and indigenous peoples are still left behind.

The urgency for data disaggregation based on ethnicity, has been one of the main recommendations of all the sessions of the Permanent Forum and the involvement of indigenous peoples in generating data is crucial, because in the Millennium Development Goals Country Reports indigenous peoples are often invisible, hidden under the general national averages which do not reflect the differentiated realities for specific groups.

Indigenous peoples would like to achieve the MDGs, however, I am deeply concerned that if the MDGs process does not take into account indigenous peoples participation, indigenous lives will continue to be threatened and marginalized. It is very difficult to imagine how the MDGs can be achieved for indigenous peoples without tackling the structural causes of their impoverishment and marginalization. I hope that the Forum will adopt strong recommendations as to how indigenous peoples can become central actors in this process. The involvement of indigenous peoples in the implementation and monitoring of the MDGs will be very critical.

When we talk about extreme poverty and hunger, for indigenous peoples this is almost synonymous to talking about their increasing alienation from their territories and resources and their diminished capacity to continue producing their traditional foods and engage in traditional livelihoods. The World Bank has just released a study on Indigenous Poverty in five countries, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Nicaragua and Mexico. The conclusion of the study is that poverty has worsened even much more among indigenous peoples in these countries. While we know this, to see the empirical evidences proving this, makes us question truly, where has the world gone wrong? Some of these countries have ratified

ILO Convention 169, they amended their constitutions to recognize the pluri-ethnic and pluricultural character of their societies. There are strong indigenous peoples' movements which are able to bring down governments, as we have seen in Ecuador. Yet the situation of impoverishment has turned for the worse. What kind of development interventions and thinking is needed to change this situation?

We should be able to use the MDG review process to look more deeply into the structural and systemic causes of these and seriously address these. The whole issue of rights and control over territories and resources, maybe a central issue that has to be dealt with if we are talking about extreme poverty. This is one of the challenges in the Permanent Forum. How do we use all the studies and research, Special Rapporteur reports, results of workshop-seminars on rights to land and land tenure issues? How about the Special Rapporteur on Right to Food report? We need to look into these and analyse whether the recommendations are being implemented. If not we should identify the role the Permanent Forum should play.

The Millenium Project Report of Professor Jeffrey Sachs, which we will hear about in this session, might shed light on how indigenous peoples' issues should be addressed in this MDG process. This contains a few references to indigenous peoples. But what we need is to see are further steps that need to be taken to address implementation issues? Will the Permanent Forum have a role to play at the High Level Panel on June-July on the MDGs? What can the Inter-Agency Support Group do to interface with the implementation of MDGs with specific focus on indigenous peoples?

The Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People proclaimed by the General Assembly last year that coincides with the time-span set for the achievement of the MDGs by 2015, therefore the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues looks forward to seeing an active interface between these two processes.

For indigenous peoples, it is not feasible to talk of development without talking about respect for their fundamental individual and collective human rights and development with a gender perspective. The implementation of the Millennium Declaration, including the MDGs, should be ensured without indigenous peoples losing their territories, identities and cultures. It is encouraging to see that in many parts of the world indigenous peoples are already pursuing and implementing their own visions of development. We hope that Governments, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs and the private sector will contribute to these efforts, in consequence indigenous peoples will not be forgotten or neglected during this global process towards implementing the MDGs.

Dear Colleagues,

During this session of the Forum we need to hold serious dialogues in order to find ways to achieve the MDGs, so that indigenous peoples can have the same opportunities as our non-indigenous brothers and sisters, enjoy at least the same standard of health, have access to education that values their cultures and allows them to reach

their full individual and group potential. We must together work for a world where  
-- indigenous people would have the right to grow old – and we would no longer die 20 or  
30 years earlier than our non-indigenous brothers and sisters, for a world where, when  
our old people pass away, their spirits can rest in their traditional territories, which will  
have been restored to them, and where our children will be able to imagine a future in  
dignity and rights.

Thank you.