Mr. Chairman,

The Indigenous World Association would like to thank the Permanent Forum for giving us this opportunity to address the situation of Indigenous Peoples in North America. Forums such as this with both the governments of the United States of America and Canada together with Indigenous representatives are extremely rare.

There are many issues that we could raise here but to save time we will focus only on a few. First, we would highlight the lack of consultation and democracy with the current government in Canada. A prime example was the cancellation of the Kelowna Accord in 2006. This accord was negotiated with several of the major Indigenous organizations in Canada, along with the agreement of Premiers of all the Provinces and Territories in Canada and the Prime Minister of Canada. This agreement would have added 5 Billion dollars to be applied to the education and housing for Indigenous Peoples. It was a historic and unprecedented agreement; an agreement with the democratically elected and majority governments of all the political entities in Canada. This agreement was callously cancelled by the new minority government of Canada in early 2006 representing less than the majority of Canadians; a tragic and undemocratic end to a year and a half of hard negotiations. What trust can Indigenous Peoples have in a government that ignores democracy? How do you negotiate without trust?

Even the recent announcement of new funding does not make up for the four years of lost time and continuing eroding of the social fabric of our people.

Lately, the Prime Minister of Canada goes in front of the world press at a meeting of the G8 and tells the whole world that Canada 'has no history of colonialism.' A pompous and arrogant statement, which was totally inaccurate and insulting to the colonized Indigenous Peoples in Canada. The Prime Minister of Canada has no idea what it is like to be Indigenous in Canada nor has he even apologized for making such an incredulous statement.

We welcome the announcement that Canada will eventually endorse the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and that the United States is reconsidering its position. These are positive signals that could improve the situation of Indigenous Peoples in North America. We hope that these announcements will result in more support for the rights of Indigenous Peoples in international conferences and forums.

For instance, the US and Canada boycotted the Durban Review Conference last year on the pretext that the conference was biased against Israel. If you read the Durban Declaration of 2001 you will not find any derogatory articles against Israel but you find one article that states, in part, ‘The term Indigenous Peoples does not imply any rights under international law.’ That is biased, discriminatory and, in our opinion, racist against Indigenous Peoples.

Fortunately, Canada and the United States boycotted the Durban Review Conference and as a result, a paragraph in the outcome document states that the conference welcomes the endorsement of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and it should be used to combat racism against Indigenous Peoples. This is an important paragraph for us and we doubt that such a paragraph would have survived if Canada and the United States were present. Canada
and the US have been consistently opposing any reference to the Declaration in various UN meetings such as the discussions on the Convention on Bio-Diversity. We thank you for boycotting the conference but not for the reasons you stayed away. Perhaps if Canada and the US boycotted more UN meetings, we could get better paragraphs on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. This is the opinion of other states as well.

One final point, Mr. Chairman, we would like to comment on the description of Indigenous Peoples by governments in North America with terms like Status Indians or Federally Recognized Tribes. It is the Creator who put Indigenous Peoples in what is called North America. It is not for the States to decide who is Indigenous and who is not. The Creator decided that for us.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.