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Chairperson

**ADDRESS TO THE OPENING OF THE TWELFTH SESSION OF THE
PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES**

New York, 20 May 2013

Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr Wu Hongbo
Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,
Distinguished observers from Member States, Indigenous Peoples' Organizations, the
Inter-Governmental system, non-governmental organizations, academia and the media,
indigenous sisters and brothers, indigenous youth and indigenous parliamentarians.

It is with my great pleasure that I welcome all of you here today at this twelfth session of
the Permanent Forum.

I want to acknowledge the Onondaga Nation, in particular, Tadodaho Sid Hill, the
traditional Chief of the Onondaga Nation, the original inhabitants of this land and to thank
them for the welcome into their beautiful territory once again.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere gratitude to my colleagues, the
Expert Members of the Permanent Forum for their confidence in and support for electing
me as the Chairperson for this session of the Permanent Forum. I also acknowledge their
remarkable depth of knowledge, skill, commitment and experience and thank them for
their unwavering contributions in fulfilling the Permanent Forum's mandate and for
supporting the implementation of its recommendations.

Over the past year, in our capacity as Expert members, we have engaged in various
processes at the national, regional and international levels to continually raise awareness
on issues of importance to indigenous peoples. The Permanent Forum members continue
to attend local, national and international meetings of importance for its mandate and have
actively promoted indigenous peoples' participation at inter-governmental meetings.

The Forum has also created a space for cooperation with the UN system through its comprehensive recommendations in all the areas of its mandate. The Forum is the foremost body for dialogue between indigenous peoples, UN agencies and States.

This year is a review year for the Permanent Forum and we are reviewing the recommendations on Health, Education and Culture and trying to assess how the Forum's recommendations are being implemented on the ground and whether in fact there are changes being made at the local levels. This is a real challenge for us as we are well aware that indigenous peoples are still lagging behind in terms of access to basic services such as health and education and indigenous peoples' culture is not respected by the wider society unless it is about luring the tourist dollars.

The hardest issue for our children, even if they are able to attend school, is that all too often they are not receiving instruction in their own languages in the school system. Too often we hear criticism of indigenous children dropping out of school and how parents are to blame for not making their children go to school, when in fact parents are not able to participate or have no genuine decision-making power about what they want from the education system or what they want their children to learn.

Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions as well as providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. Further, indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination. This is outlined in Article 14 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as well as Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, where education should be free and available to all children. This includes indigenous children.

We are aware that indigenous peoples throughout the world – whether they live in developed or developing countries continue to die from preventable diseases. In fact, it

almost seems there is a real lack of understanding of indigenous peoples' vision of health. For example, indigenous peoples' idea of sickness or illness tends to refer to an absence of wellbeing or an imbalance. Connections, relations, and family are among the many essential components of wellbeing. All these factors interact to form an Indigenous notion of healing processes that are very different from the wider society.

Indigenous peoples' health is widely understood to also be affected by a range of cultural factors, including racism, along with various indigenous-specific factors, such as loss of language and connection to the land, environmental deprivation, and spiritual, emotional, and mental disconnectedness.

Indigenous people need to be able to exercise their autonomy and right to self-determination to promote indigenous health perspectives and traditional healing as part of comprehensive primary health care in collaboration with health services.

Article 24 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states that indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals. Indigenous individuals also have the right to access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services.

There is an incredibly urgent need for all of us, Indigenous Peoples' organizations and nations, the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples Issues, States and various funds established to support indigenous peoples and the United Nations to take collaborative and coordinated actions, bold and effective, to address the continued discrimination, racism, marginalization, extreme poverty and conflicts that indigenous peoples continue to face. Indifference to these issues should not be tolerated because as we well know, indifference is the breeding ground for intolerance.

The members of the Permanent Forum are especially thankful to the Government of the Republic of Congo for hosting our pre-session meeting which took place 11 – 15 March

2013 in Brazzaville. This was a very historical occasion as it was the first time the Permanent Forum met in Africa. It was very heartening that the Republic of Congo has taken a key step in adopting Law No 5-2011 on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Indigenous Populations, and we hope other countries will be inspired to follow this good practice. The key challenge now is to implement the law.

During their consultations with indigenous peoples, Permanent Forum members were informed on the continuing problem of discrimination, and of marginalization. Indigenous representatives described the problems they face in accessing schools and universities, and in getting jobs. Indigenous women spoke of the lack of maternal and child care, and giving birth in forests. It does not have to be this way.

The Forum members also met with Parliamentarians, and with government officials including the Minister of Forests and offered different examples to overcome the persistent challenges faced by the indigenous peoples. Forum members also met with UN agencies and other partners on various projects and programmes developed within the framework of the national action plan on the improvement of the quality of life of indigenous peoples.

The pre-session meeting also allowed the Members to plan and decide the necessary arrangements for this very important twelfth Session.

Let me now turn to some of the work that needs to be considered over the next two weeks.

The twelfth session is the Permanent Forum's review year. This afternoon, we will be moving to the Trusteeship Council Chambers where we will discuss the report of the Expert Group Meeting that was held in January on Indigenous Youth. Then there will be a focus on the health, education and culture which will be reviewed through panel discussions.

On Wednesday the agenda item focuses on human rights with a critical focus on the Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. There will be statements by EMRIP, the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations, the

Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and *Working Group* on the issue of *human rights* and transnational corporations and other *business* enterprises. There will also be an important and necessary dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples.

On Thursday there will be a Half-Day discussion on indigenous peoples in the African region. I encourage as many African States to attend this session so that we can have an constructive dialogue between indigenous peoples, UN Agencies and States.

On Friday, we will have an in-depth dialogue with the World Bank; the Asian Development Bank; the African Development Bank; the Inter-American Development Bank and International Finance Corporation and their support and engagement with indigenous peoples.

Next week there is public holiday on Monday so there will be no meeting. On Tuesday, we will have a discussion on the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples to be held in 2014.

As part of the agenda item on Future Work, there will be a focus on the development agenda beyond 2015. This is very important and as indigenous peoples, we must not be left behind in this process. We have to be strongly engaged and our views must be incorporated in the Sustainable Development goals which could be further elaborated during the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

These are just some of the highlights to be covered during this twelfth session.

We have a very full agenda of activities, including many side events which will take place during lunch time and evenings. Tomorrow night (Tuesday) is the cultural event and reception and I hope you will support the performances of our brothers and sisters. Culture is of course an important part of indigenous peoples' identity. In fact, one day I would like a see a dedicate day for indigenous peoples to sell their crafts as a form cultural exchange, right here in New York.

In closing, I would like to reiterate my gratitude to my Permanent Forum colleagues for taking on their important roles and tackling these challenges. This includes the implementation of the Permanent Forum's recommendations and also raising awareness of issues important to Indigenous peoples.

I also extend our sincere thanks to our Secretariat staff who work tirelessly, not only to prepare for this session, but for keeping the fires burning in between sessions.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to indigenous peoples of the world who continue the struggle for their rights, sometimes sacrificing their own lives in the process. I call on all of us to work together to make meaningful and worthwhile changes for the survival, dignity and well-being of all indigenous peoples.

Thank You.