

**WCIP Roundtable 1: “UN System Action for the Implementation of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”**

**Monday, September 22, United Nations Headquarters, New York**

**United States statement by Ambassador Keith Harper**

Thank you, co-chairpersons and distinguished panelists. As U.S. Ambassador to the Human Rights Council and member of the Cherokee Nation, I am honored to lead the U.S. delegation to this high-level UN General Assembly meeting devoted to advancing indigenous peoples’ rights worldwide.

We applaud the joint efforts of member states and indigenous representatives to arrive at a World Conference outcome document containing positive, action-oriented commitments on behalf of indigenous peoples. The text addresses key priorities of the U.S. government and U.S. tribal leaders, including those discussed during formal United States-hosted consultations.

The document adopted this morning underscores the commitments of member states to advance and uphold the principles and goals of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We are gratified that the document supports the empowerment of indigenous women and eliminating violence and discrimination against them. Violence against indigenous women and girls has devastating effects on the individuals, their families, and their communities. I have made this one of my highest priorities at the Human Rights Council. To call attention to this worldwide scourge, the United States issued a joint statement on behalf of 35 countries, a number of them represented here today, at the June 2014 Human Rights Council session. Further, we support the outcome document’s call to have the Commission on the Status of Women focus on empowering indigenous women.

There are three topics in the outcome document on which further action is especially needed. First, the United States sees great merit in reflecting on how the UN can measure member states’ progress in achieving the objectives of the UN Declaration. We welcome specific proposals from member states, indigenous representatives, and the UN in this regard. We look forward to the Secretary-General’s recommendations and options on how to use existing UN mechanisms for this purpose. The possibility to modify the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) for this purpose holds promise, and options for amending its mandate or revising its composition should be explored.

Second, the outcome document requests the Secretary-General to present proposals on enhancing indigenous peoples’ participation at the UN. At the present time, indigenous governments and other representational institutions can participate in the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII), but only accredited NGOs can participate in any of the other meetings at the United Nations open to civil society observers. The United Nations must establish procedures that recognize tribal leaders and tribal governments for who they are – persons and governments who are distinct from NGO representatives and who represent their own constituencies. The United States looks forward to working with tribal governments, the Secretary-General and other

Member States to enable indigenous representative institutions to participate accordingly in UN meetings.

Finally, we need to approach indigenous issues holistically -- throughout the UN system. We support the call for an inter-agency effort to derive a plan for a coherent approach -- including UN agencies, funds, and programs in field as well as at headquarters -- to achieve the ends of the Declaration. The United States will work with the Secretary-General to identify an appropriate existing official within the system to oversee and coordinate these efforts.

Chairpersons, this World Conference is a long-overdue step in focusing the attention of the United Nations on challenges facing indigenous peoples. Important work has been done, but we have much more work ahead. The World Conference is not an end in and of itself. It is a call for further action, direct action, decisive action. An important measure of our success today will be what action we take from here to give life to the words in the Outcome Document. And the world community should not rest until we have achieved healthy, safe and prosperous indigenous communities everywhere. The United States is committed to that end.