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**Tenth Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Intervention on Agenda Item 4
to be delivered by Del Laverdure,
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary,
Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior**

Thank you, Madam Chair, Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum, participants and fellow observers.

I am Del Laverdure, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs in the U.S. Department of the Interior. I am a member of the Crow Nation.

As Kimberly Teehee noted at the Opening Session on Monday, the United States is very pleased to support the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. U.S. Ambassador Susan Rice explained last year that the decision to review our position on the Declaration directly complemented our commitment to work together with the international community on the many challenges faced by indigenous peoples.

I would like to take a few moments today to explain further what U.S. support for the Declaration means to us.

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When he announced U.S. support for the Declaration, President Obama stated – and I quote: “What matters far more than words -- what matters far more than any resolution or declaration – are actions to match those words.”

President Obama said that is the standard that he expects his Administration to be held to – a standard of action. We are already being challenged to meet that standard. That is appropriate; it is a good thing. We recognize that there is much more that remains to be done.

The United States is committed to ensuring that U.S. support for the UN Declaration is meaningful and contributes to the improvement of the lives of Native Americans. We intend to do this in a number of ways.

Perhaps most fundamentally, we intend to continue working with tribal leaders to identify the matters that they believe are priorities for U.S. government action and to formulate appropriate responses.

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Indeed, President Obama himself has reached out to tribal leaders and invited them to Washington to meet with him and many of his Cabinet officials at two White House Tribal Nations Conferences. Those sessions gave tribal leaders unique opportunities to discuss their priorities with the President and his most senior officials.

Many of the priorities identified by tribal leaders at the two White House Tribal Nations Conferences are very closely related to the UN Declaration. Indeed, a significant recommendation of the tribal leaders at the first White House Tribal Nations Conference was that the U.S. support the Declaration, which President Obama was able to do one year later – at the second Tribal Nations Conference.

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Tribal leaders at both White House Tribal Nations Conferences also stressed the importance of government-to-government consultation with tribes before actions are taken that directly affect them. In response, the United States is working to reinvigorate implementation of the U.S. Executive Order on “Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments”. That Executive Order requires federal agencies to consult with tribal officials on “policies that have tribal implications,” a term that is broadly defined in the order. To improve the implementation of the order, President Obama, at the first White House Tribal Nations Conference with tribal leaders in November 2009, signed a Presidential Memorandum directing all U.S. federal agencies to develop detailed plans to fully implement the Executive Order. For those who are interested, my agency’s draft consultation plan is on the Department of the Interior website.

President Obama’s directive has had its intended effect. Tribal consultations are at an unprecedented level throughout the U.S. government. Indeed, some tribal leaders will tell you that the effect has been too many requests for consultations. We are therefore exploring ways of coordinating agency requests for consultation and of using technology to smooth the consultation process.

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One example of a significant ongoing process of consultation with tribal leaders is the effort being conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Forest Service regarding sacred sites. Because they heard from many tribal governments that improvements were needed, the agencies are now engaged in a year-long series of tribal consultations to identify ways in which better processes can be put in place to protect sacred sites.

Tribal consultations are not only taking place, they are also having effect. For example, in response to concerns expressed by tribal leaders, the Department of Agriculture opened eligibility to the Renewable Energy for America Program to tribal business entities, thus improving access to renewable energy program funding. Similarly, the Department of the Interior has taken 105,000 acres of land into trust for tribes in the past two years as a part of our effort to restore tribal homelands. The Department of the Interior is also working to respond to requests to streamline the process by which tribes are federally recognized.

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U.S. efforts on consultations with tribal leaders are just one of many U.S. government initiatives that complement U.S. support for the UN Declaration. I invite you to read the Announcement document that was released to accompany President Obama's remarks for information on additional initiatives as well as a further explanation of the U.S. position on the Declaration.

Madam Chair, thank you for the opportunity to comment on these important issues.