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Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW)
to the sixth session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

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On behalf of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW) I want to convey our deep appreciation for the opportunity of addressing this important Forum and to express our best wishes for a fruitful outcome.

Indigenous peoples have made considerable progress for the recognition of their rights at the local, national and international levels. One of their most important successes at the international level has been the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the Council of Human Rights in 2006.

In Latin America the presence of indigenous organizations and movements has been very relevant in some countries. One of their most important successes has been the increase in their capacity to promote and support their candidates' access to local governments and to national government, as in the case of Bolivia. The indigenous peoples in some countries are now occupying new spaces of power promoting changes within the institutions, the state and society. However, in Latin America they are still among the poorest of the poor, and have less access to education, health and other basic services. And within this group, the situation of indigenous women is even worse.

There has been an increase in political presence of indigenous representatives in local and national governments. This process is helping to improve governance, and to increase access to resources, information and advice regarding their legal rights and the government programmes and policies. But there is still much to be done in order to have a democratic representation of indigenous men and women in governments and in the distribution of resources. Poverty alleviation, reduction of maternal and infant mortality, increased access to education and health services are necessary prerequisites to achieve the MDGs. Without the participation of indigenous peoples and in particular of indigenous women, in positions of power and decision making, a more equitable and democratic society can not be achieved.

The United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW), with the support of the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional (AECI) has just concluded the first of a three-years project on *Strengthening governance from a gender perspective and women's political participation at the local level in Latin America*, which is being implemented with a specific focus on the political participation of indigenous women. The Institute recently released a five-country study on indigenous women in politics and decision-making in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala and Peru, available at our website (www.un-instraw.org) and an analysis of mechanisms such as quota laws and systems at both the national and local levels. The findings show that while these mechanisms are essential, they do not redress indigenous women's low levels of representation or guarantee the exercise of their democratic rights.

UN-INSTRAW's research reveals that over the past decade, indigenous women have made a number of gains, including:

- Greater visibility and overall recognition of women in the public sphere of social life;
- Advances in the number of women participating in local forums for consultation and deliberation, including development councils, negotiation tables and participatory planning forums and processes;
- New issues and narratives are being introduced into the policy agenda and into investments, such as the role of indigenous women in eco-tourism initiatives or the productive and environmental challenges of women's local economic base, and
- Changes in the accessibility, development and inter-linkage of development assets; for example, a generally higher level of education with regard to human capital; an increase in the formation of and participation in social networks; an improvement in health; and greater sensitivity to issues such as domestic violence.

However, a number of obstacles remain, including:

- Poverty, which continues to penalize indigenous populations, particularly indigenous women in rural areas;
- Tension between the conceptualization of government and governance by States and the international community, on the one hand, and by indigenous women, on the other;
- Political violence and social conflict at the local and national levels;
- The near-invisibility of the specific problems of indigenous women, including limited data and insufficient disaggregation by sex of available data; and
- A reductive view limited to the quantitative aspects of political participation.

UN-INSTRAW's research points to various areas of future work:

- A focus on small-scale initiatives that are interlinked and that can be substantially scaled up;
- Increase and renew the quality and extent of participation and leadership of young indigenous women;
- Public political debates from the local to the national level highlighting the advances and results of the effort to increase indigenous women's participation;

A broad and diversified institutional environment can represent an opportunity for increasing indigenous women's participation and providing more appropriate systemic responses in terms of public policies and investments. To this end, capacity to engage in dialogue and a democratic and non-discriminatory processes of dialogue have to be increased.

UN-INSTRAW offers its support in these endeavours, and looks forward to continue working to contribute to increase the participation of indigenous women in politics and decision-making.