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 UN-HABITAT	Sixth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 14 – 25 May 2007, New York
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Madam Chairperson distinguished Participants, Friends, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Habitat Agenda and the Millennium Development Goals provide the main mandates to UN-HABITAT. Target 11, “by 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers”, and Target 10, “to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation”, are the current specific focus areas.

The Forum, in its previous sessions, rightly recognized urbanization as an important process affecting the lives of everyone including indigenous peoples. With this focus and mandate, UN-HABITAT, through the United Nations Housing Rights Programme, jointly implemented with OHCHR, conducted a research project and published in 2005 the book “Indigenous peoples’ right to adequate housing: A Global Overview”. In its fourth and fifth sessions, the Permanent Forum recommended that follow-up activities to this initiative should be carried out and an expert seminar on the topic should be organized. At its fifth session and in paragraph 161 of its report, the Permanent Forum recommended particularly to expand the scope of this initiative beyond the field of housing and to cover urban issues comprehensively under the general title of “Urban indigenous peoples and migration”.

I am pleased to report that the Expert Group Meeting on Urban Indigenous Peoples and Migration, co-organized by UN-HABITAT, the Secretariat of UNPFII, OHCHR, Latin America and the Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE) – ECLAC, in cooperation with IOM, took place in Santiago de Chile from 27-29 March 2007. The meeting, fully financed by the Government of Canada, constituted the first international expert-level initiative on the challenges of improving the quality of life of urban indigenous peoples and ongoing rural-urban migration. The aim of this initiative was to facilitate better understanding of the situation regarding the living conditions and rights of indigenous peoples in urban areas through the generation of comprehensive knowledge and to elaborate policy recommendations for improving the living and human rights conditions of indigenous peoples.

The meeting brought together 75 participants, including members of relevant UN agencies, and organizations and observers from various countries. Invited experts were from Africa; Arctic; Asia; Eastern Europe, Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia; Latin America and the Caribbean; North America; and Pacific.

Amongst diverse recommendations, the experts highlighted that rights of the members of indigenous peoples should be recognized and respected as the first step to improving their living conditions. Public authorities need to understand the multiple identities of indigenous peoples within urban areas and their continuing relationship to their traditional lands and natural resources. It was also noted that indigenous peoples should not be seen as divided between urban and rural, but rather as peoples with rights and a common cultural identity as well as facing similar challenges in adapting to changing circumstances and environments. To respond adequately to this complex reality, comprehensive policies based on the recognition of religious, political, social, cultural, spiritual rights, including of indigenous peoples’ sacred sites, need to be formulated. In a complementary fashion, States must work in collaboration with various stakeholders to adopt policies that enable indigenous peoples to take full advantage of the opportunities that exist in urban areas. I do not wish to elaborate more on the outcome of this event since there will be a comprehensive discussion on this topic in the afternoon of 21 May, to which you are all invited.

Regarding other relevant information that UN-HABITAT wishes to convey, I would like to report that three of the resolutions adopted by the 20th session of the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT in 2005 make particular reference to challenges faced by indigenous communities in the urban context and

constitute UN-HABITAT's most recent policy direction in this area: These resolutions are respectively on "Youth and human settlements", where the Governing Council expresses its special concern "that girls and young women and indigenous young people are particularly at risk of exclusion and discrimination,..."; on "Sustainable development of Arctic cities", where the Governing Council notes with concern that the development of human settlements of the far north and the Arctic region is impeded by several conditions and requests special attention and measures; and on "housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living for persons who are vulnerable and disadvantaged", where this right is reaffirmed with elaboration on what UN-HABITAT and States should do to contribute to the realization of this right.

I will now summarize a section of our report regarding the special theme, "Territories, lands and national resources":

UN-HABITAT has several instruments, programmes, projects and activities that are relevant to indigenous peoples' lands, territories and resources. Overall, UN-HABITAT's global programmes and activities focusing on poverty alleviation in the context of the MDGs, impact directly on indigenous people's livelihoods. UN-HABITAT's activities in the field of disaster mitigation, post conflict reconstruction and safety are, for example, related to housing and living conditions of indigenous peoples in most cases.

However, the United Nations Housing Rights Programme, jointly implemented with OHCHR, the Advisory Group on Forced Evictions, and the Global Land Tool Network, are UN-HABITAT's instruments whose practices are most directly related to issues of indigenous peoples' lands, territories and resources. They are all actively contributing to the much needed advocacy work, research and tool development for indigenous peoples' housing rights and secure tenure.

Within the limited time, I wish to elaborate only on the Global Land Tool Network, also known as "GLTN", initiated by UN-HABITAT and partners like Swedish SIDA and the World Bank, which seeks to develop and promote innovative and flexible land tools able to achieve security of tenure and housing rights for vulnerable groups, including indigenous peoples. One of GLTN's key priorities is the development of effective land administration and governance tools as an instrument to include, amongst others, indigenous groups. GLTN aims at establishing a continuum of land rights including for minority groups, rather than focusing only on individual land titling.

Land policies in most countries continue to promote individual land ownership through property title registration. For several reasons, this does not often meet the needs of indigenous people who, in many cases, have collective land ownership systems and cannot afford individual land titles. Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that indigenous peoples have been disadvantaged during titling operations, for example through technical difficulties in determining their land boundaries. The high costs of titling and cumbersome registration procedures have in many instances proven to be obstacles for indigenous communities to access freehold or other forms of individual ownership.

Tenure systems developed and practiced by indigenous communities in many situations are based on simpler and culturally familiar and/or adapted procedures. These indigenous tenure systems should be seen as alternatives to conventional models. Experience from the past 30 years has shown that customary indigenous land tenure can coexist with the statutory system. Thus, communities that were granted collective tenure have used a wide variety of technologies and methods to map and demarcate their land.

Our report, Madam Chairperson, also elaborates on how UN-HABITAT's ongoing activities are contributing to the five main objectives of the Second International Decade of the world's Indigenous Peoples.

Finally, I would like to say farewell to all friends and colleagues as I will retire, like Lee Swepston of ILO, by the end of July, and this is the last time I am representing UN-HABITAT in this Forum. I believe that we have tried our best to bring forth the importance of urbanization and urban life to the attention of indigenous peoples and related stakeholders. The new UN-HABITAT focal point, I am sure, will continue these efforts.