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Fourth session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

**Statement by Mrs. Tarcila Rivera Zea
on behalf of the
Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations**

I thank you for giving me this opportunity to take the floor to address the fourth session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations. I would also like to seize this opportunity to welcome the 26 grantees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples present with us during this session.

As you are aware, the mandate of the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations is to assist representatives of indigenous organizations and communities to participate in the deliberations of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Since its inception in 1985, the mandate of the UN Voluntary Fund was extended five times, following the natural evolution of the indigenous peoples' human rights agenda and responding to indigenous peoples' demands. In its resolution 65/198 of 21 December 2010, the General Assembly decided to expand the mandate of the Fund to enable representatives of indigenous peoples' organizations to participate in sessions of the Human Rights Council and of human rights treaty bodies.

At its last session held in February 2011, the Board of Trustees considered about 564 applications for travel grants for a total amount of 2,333,000 USD. However, in light of the very limited available resources, the Board was only able to recommend the allocation of 54 travel grants from the different indigenous regions of the world to attend the 2011 Permanent Forum and the Expert Mechanism for a total amount of 235,000 USD. About 90 per cent of the applications could not be funded.

The Voluntary Fund has given indigenous peoples a voice at the United Nations by creating the opportunity through financial support to participate in UN meetings which directly affect their lives. The Voluntary Fund supported more than 1'400 grantees, many of whom directly engaged in negotiations related to the preparation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to

the establishment of various UN mechanisms including the Permanent Forum, Expert Mechanism and Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples. The Fund has provided indigenous peoples innumerable opportunities to raise their issues and concerns internationally, to share best practises in matters related to the operationalisation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the country level, to network with other indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations, and to dialogue with nation-state Governments and United Nations bodies.

The extension of the mandate of the Fund will enable indigenous representatives to attend sessions of the Human Rights Council and treaty bodies. Direct participation of indigenous peoples from all the world's regions in the work of these mechanisms is critical to establishing constructive dialogue between UN member states, UN bodies and mechanisms and bridging the implementation gap. It ensures that indigenous peoples' human rights concerns and abuses are channelled in the appropriate bodies that can address them for achieving concrete impact and make the principles enshrined in the Declaration a reality at the country level.

Since 2010, at the request of a number of indigenous grantees, the Secretariat of the Fund, in partnership with the DOCIP and the European Commission, has organised human rights training sessions for indigenous representatives. Through these trainings led by experienced indigenous delegates, indigenous grantees have increased their knowledge on the effective use of human rights mechanisms and bodies including the treaty bodies, Human Rights Council, Universal Periodic Review and the Special Procedures.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I would like to express our gratitude and thanks to the following countries: Argentina, Australia, Chile, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Holy See, Mexico, Spain and Turkey for their generous contributions to the Voluntary Fund. We furthermore appeal to all Governments, organizations and private donors to consider contributing to the Voluntary Fund, if possible by the end of this year, in order to enable the Fund and Board of Trustees to fulfill its mandate in the coming year.

Though we have ensured maximizing the dollars contributed to the Fund thus far, we must also recognize the trend of a major decrease in donations. In contrast, the number of applications continues to grow each year. In the past four years, the Fund has experienced a 70 per cent decrease in contributions. This dramatic decrease presents an extraordinary challenge for the Fund and its new mandate. Let us remind you that the Fund only exists through the voluntary contributions made by governments and other donors.

Indigenous communities, for the most part, continue to be at the margins of the larger society and constitute the poorest of the poor and the most vulnerable peoples of the world. The mandate of the Fund was established to remove the stumbling blocks to indigenous peoples' participation in the

United Nations processes and to make sure that their voice is heard at the international level. Any contribution, large or small, can make a dramatic difference for indigenous peoples and contribute to help them to achieve the implementation and realization of their human rights on the ground.

I thank you.