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6th Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Agenda item 5 Future work of the Forum

Wednesday 23 May 2007

**Statement by Mr. Nadir Bekirov  
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 address the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome the 54 beneficiaries of travel grants of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations present with us during this session.

The Voluntary Fund was created pursuant to General Assembly resolution 40/131 in 1985, with the purpose of assisting representatives of indigenous communities and organizations to participate in the deliberations of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations. The Mandate was expanded on two occasions by the General Assembly to assist representatives of indigenous communities and organizations to participate in the deliberations of the Working Group on the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Since the establishment of the Fund, more than a thousand indigenous representatives have been supported.

The Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations has given indigenous peoples a voice at the United Nations by providing them with the opportunity to raise their issues internationally, participate in meetings where decisions affecting their lives are taken, contribute to the deliberations with their first hand experiences, dialogue with Governments and UN Agencies and network with other indigenous peoples and non-governmental organizations.

Beneficiaries have pointed out that their presence at UN meetings has helped them to develop their leadership capabilities and expertise, providing them with tools to protect their human rights. It has also led in some cases to solving issues directly with governmental delegations and prevent conflicts. The Fund has ensured that indigenous peoples are involved in standard setting activities affecting them.

The value of their statements, knowledge and relationships established in these meetings have been of great utility for beneficiaries themselves, their communities as well as for other participants.

The increasing number of requests and the limited available funding presents the Board of Trustees with tough choices. For example, at the last session of the Board of Trustees that took place in February 2006, 517 admissible applications were received and examined by the 5 independent indigenous experts who recommended to the Secretary General to distribute about USD 478'000 between 127 beneficiaries to participate in sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and Working Group on Indigenous Populations. Regrettably, a large number of representatives: more 75 per cent, have to be turned down.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our new donors: Holy Sea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Spain, Venezuela and our regular donors Algeria, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Norway, for their invaluable contributions. I invite all of them to maintain their support to the Fund to ensure the participation of indigenous peoples in UN meetings. I would also like to appeal to all Governments, organizations and private donors to consider contributing to the Voluntary Fund, if possible before the next meeting of the Board in February 2008, in support of indigenous peoples worldwide and in order to enable the Fund and Board of Trustees to fulfill its mandate.

The Board wishes to underline the valuable work done by the WGIP during this past 24 years and hopes that the new human rights expert body mechanism that may be created by the Human Rights Council, be open to the participation of all indigenous peoples organizations as it was the case under the WGIP.

The Board of Trustees welcomes the adoption by the Human Rights Council of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on the 29th June 2006 by the Human Rights Council and expresses its deep appreciation to the 130 Fund beneficiaries that received travel grants for sessions of the Working Group on the Draft Declaration between 1995 and 2005. The Board hopes that a common understanding about the declaration will be found that will allow for acceptance by states.

The Board of Trustees is aware that the Sub-Commission by its resolution 2006/13 of 24 August 2006 recommended that States consider asking the General Assembly to broaden the mandate of the Voluntary Fund so as to allow indigenous peoples to participate in the meetings of the Treaty Bodies and to provide small funding for projects that will help the fund beneficiaries to transfer and disseminate knowledge acquired during their participation to the WGIP and PFII to the members of their communities.

We would very much appreciate to hear the opinions of the members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and donors countries on such recommendations.

I thank you very much Madam Chairperson,