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UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL  
FIRST SESSION  
(Geneva, 19 - 30 June 2006)

Consideration of the report  
of the open-ended intersessional Working Group  
on a draft United Nations declaration  
on the rights of indigenous peoples

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Statement by H.E. Ambassador Wolfgang PETRITSCH  
Permanent Representative of Austria  
on behalf of the European Union

Geneva, 27 June 2006

**Check against delivery**

Mr President,

The European Union would like to thank the Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Draft Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples for his presentation and welcomes his report on the 11<sup>th</sup> session.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia\*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and the EFTA country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

In the 61<sup>st</sup> session of the Commission on Human Rights it was decided that the Working Group should be extended for only one additional year, rather than the two proposed by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Last December the Working Group met with the clear sense that it would be its last meeting. At the end of the first two weeks, the EU underlined that it would participate in the final week on the understanding that we had reached a point of no return and that our common goal had to be to agree on a finalised draft declaration. In its closing statement at the end of the session we made clear our view that although we were not able to reach consensus on all articles, the crucial elements to provide solutions on the outstanding issues had become increasingly clear in the course of the third week. We expressed our confidence that you Mr. Chairman would prepare a text which would allow us to move to the adoption of a good and strong declaration. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your tireless efforts in furthering the process of elaborating the draft declaration and bringing us to this point.

The negotiation process of the Working Group on the Draft Declaration was unique in UN standard setting practice by involving representatives of indigenous peoples on an equal footing with states. This made the negotiations challenging given the breadth of interests represented; but importantly, it also made the process as inclusive as possible.

The EU regrets that it was not possible to reach agreement on all articles of the draft declaration, and particularly, that some states with indigenous peoples do not feel able to join consensus on the text. Indeed, no party to the negotiations can claim that the result is perfect. However, the EU is of the opinion that the final compromise text offers the best achievable outcome to the working group process. The EU therefore supports action being taken on this Declaration at this first session of the Human Rights Council and will support adoption of the text.

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\* *Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.*