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1st session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

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Agenda item 5 "General Statements"

**Statement by Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz**

**Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations**

I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me this opportunity to address the first session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations. The Forum has before it a Note by the Secretariat on the mandate and activities of this Fund (document E/CN.19/2002/4). Information of the mandate and activities of the UN Voluntary Fund for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples is also available in document E/CN.19/2002/4/Add.1

As you know, the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations was established by General Assembly resolution, 40/131 of 13 December 1985 with the purpose of assisting representatives of indigenous communities and organizations to participate in the deliberations of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations of the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights by means of voluntary contributions from Governments, non-governmental organizations and other private or public entities. The General Assembly, by resolution 50/156 of 21 December 1995 decided that the Fund should also assist representatives of indigenous communities and organizations to participate in the deliberations of the open-ended inter-sessional Working Group of the Commission on Human Rights established by the Commission in its resolution 1995/32, as endorsed by the Economic and Social Council on 25 July 1995.

It is a pleasure to inform the Forum today that the mandate of the Fund was expanded by General Assembly resolution 56/140 of 19 December 2001 by deciding that the Fund should also provide assistance to representatives of indigenous organizations and communities to attend, as observers, the sessions of the newly established Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The Secretariat received more than 400 applications. During inter-sessional consultations in March 2002, the Board of Trustees considered the admissible applications received within the established deadline and in accordance with the criteria for selection and the money available in the Fund, the Board recommended to the Secretary-General to approve the allocation of 25 travel grants from the different indigenous regions of the world.

Taking into consideration the number of requests received in 2002 to attend the Permanent Forum, the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and the Working Group on the draft UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples; the new mandate of the Fund and that the Board recommended for expenditure almost all the money available in the Fund at its 15<sup>th</sup> session in 2002, the Fund would need an amount of US\$800,000 before the next session of the Board of Trustees in 2003.

consider contributing to the Fund with a substantial increase in the level of contributions. Similarly, the Commission of Human Rights in its resolution 2001/59 and the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in its resolutions 2001/10 and 12, appealed to all Governments, organizations, including non-governmental organizations and indigenous groups and individuals in a position to do so to contribute to the Fund. I would also like to take this opportunity to appeal to all regular and potential donors to generously contribute to the Fund to enable the Fund and Board of Trustees at its next session in 2003 to recommend new grants to assist indigenous peoples worldwide.

Allow me to shift to additional general comments. Many suggestions have already been forwarded to members of the Permanent Forum on the hopes and aspirations of the indigenous peoples on what this body can do. However, as we all know it would take sometime before the Forum can address all these. If there are unlimited financial and human resources available then it would not be difficult to deal with these. Considering this here are some views on how the Permanent Forum can proceed with its work.

1. **Strategic Planning Meetings** – the rich interventions presented the past days are the most important basis for a well grounded work plan. However, the Permanent Forum members have to process all these information before they can decide what should be the priorities, mechanisms and who will be responsible to do what. The Permanent Forum might consider holding a series of strategic planning meetings which could be held between now and the second session. The Interagency Support Group will definitely be a part of this process. However, the PF members should be allowed to meet on their own so they can have a more free environment to deliberate and, more importantly, to strengthen their bonds with each other.
2. **Regional Caucuses** – I mentioned in my first intervention that since the PF members are coming from the various regions, it might be a good idea to hold regional consultations with the indigenous peoples in their regions. Those of us who are here are only a few of the 350 million indigenous peoples worldwide. There are many from the regions who would like to be here but they cannot, for reasons we all know. While we have a lot of commonalities we also are a diverse lot. The particularities of each indigenous nation, peoples, and communities in each region need distinct solutions. Thus, it is important for the Permanent Forum members to be able to have the possibilities of holding consultations with indigenous peoples from their regions. If the UN says there are no resources for this, then indigenous peoples and member states should be creative enough to generate these resources to hold these consultations.
3. **Creation of Working Groups to deal with specific concerns** – The Permanent Forum is tasked to raise the awareness and promote integration and coordination of activities relating to indigenous issues within the UN system. Obviously there are issues which cut across all the various agencies of the UN and even outside the UN. For example Free and Prior Informed Consent has been repeatedly mentioned as a basic principle to guide UN bodies, the banks and corporations and even NGOs who would like to undertake development projects in indigenous peoples communities. Likewise, FPIC has been recognized in various UN Conventions, policy papers of some UN bodies and even national laws on indigenous peoples. So the PF may consider creating an ad-hoc working group on FPIC and Indigenous Peoples, which will look into how this principle should be more institutionalized and mainstreamed within the UN system.
4. **Awareness raising campaigns:** A major campaign within the UN is the achievement of the Millenium Development Goals. All the member states of the UN signed on to these. Indigenous peoples should be made more aware of what these are and how these can be achieved in indigenous peoples communities. The PF should be more involved in meeting these goals and to make it more specific for indigenous peoples.

**Mr. Chair,** these are just some initial suggestions which could be elaborated further if the opportunity arises. Thank you.