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STATEMENT BY
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ASSEMBLY

TO THE SEVENTH SESSION OF THE UNITED
NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS
ISSUES

UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK,
1 MAY 2008

Madame Chairperson,
Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to continue the tradition of the Presidency of the General Assembly over the past years and address the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

I am especially thrilled to be here at the first session of the Permanent Forum since the General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in September 2007.

Albeit a non-binding text, the adoption of the Declaration – after more than 20 years of negotiations – marks a milestone in the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples worldwide. More than that, it is an important call for justice and to put an end to social exclusion and marginalization of approximately 370 million people worldwide and to ensure that their identity will be preserved.

Indigenous people are affected in a disproportionate manner by a high level of poverty and extreme poverty as well as the lack of access to health and education services. All these issues are our priority at this session of the General Assembly.

That is why it is of crucial importance that you are an active partner to address the international developmental challenges, because for far too long

the specific needs and potentials of the indigenous populations have been neglected.

Indigenous issues are inextricably linked to development, and more specifically the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

The implementation of the MDGs is one of the priorities of this session. We need to draw attention to what has been described as a '*development emergency*', which is being exacerbated by rising high food and energy prices.

At the thematic debate held recently on the MDGs, the General Assembly welcomed the idea to hold an annual debate to take stock of global implementation until 2015. It will also ensure that all partners are held to account for the implementation of their commitments to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

I would encourage the Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues to be actively engaged in these meetings.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Indigenous peoples are the stewards of some of the most precious biologically diverse regions of the world. You have accumulated an enormous wealth of information about the environment and how to manage

natural resources sustainably. You are also most directly affected by environmental degradation caused by climate change.

Therefore, I am very encouraged that during this session, the Permanent Forum has chosen to discuss the issue of climate change - arguably the greatest challenge facing humanity in the twenty-first century. The quality of life our children and grandchildren will experience depends on the decision we make now.

As you may know, climate change has been on the top of the agenda of this General Assembly and is an integral component of its strong developmental agenda, which emphasizes the nexus between the MDGs, sustainable development and financing for development. However, we should not forget the impact of climate change is a multifaceted challenge and goes beyond development issues.

In its thematic debate on climate change earlier this year the General Assembly clearly recognized the need to urgently respond to climate change and called for developing strong partnerships among all stakeholders. As a result of it two further follow up meetings will soon be held, one on the private sector investments needed to address the challenge and the other on the impacts of climate change on the most vulnerable countries. Therefore I believe it is important that indigenous peoples are an integral part of these discussions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the years, the General Assembly has addressed the challenges faced by indigenous populations. It established the Voluntary Fund on Indigenous Populations and the Voluntary Fund on Indigenous Issues, it proclaimed the International Year of the World's Indigenous People and the two International Decades of the World's Indigenous People. It also adopted a number of important resolutions.

However, we need to continue to actively support indigenous issues and peoples in order to make a real difference.

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is uniquely placed to ensure that indigenous population's knowledge and special resources is integrated into the work of the United Nations.

Your mandate provided by the Declaration will mark new challenges and opportunities for you and your role in forging closer cooperation with states, the United Nations system and indigenous peoples themselves.

I wish you all a productive conclusion of the session and I look forward to the Forum's conclusions and recommendations.

Thank you very much.