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STATEMENT BY THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Third Session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

July 12, 4 p.m.

Distinguished Experts and Indigenous Representatives, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to participate in this Third Session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on behalf of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

In January this year, UNDP organized a focus discussion with indigenous experts to elicit their views on the concept of human development on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Human Development Report. Indigenous participants expressed that “freedoms without opportunities are useless for indigenous peoples”, especially since “in most cases, freedoms of indigenous peoples are conditioned by the priorities of the dominant and majority population”.

Decision making essentially conditions the setting of priorities and allocation of resources that have a direct impact on the opportunities of peoples, communities and individuals. UNDP believes that ensuring the participation of indigenous peoples is critical to enhance democratic governance, prevent and resolve conflict, reduce poverty and protect the environment.

Whereas the principles of inclusion and participation inform all our projects and processes, UNDP is implementing a number of initiatives that I would like to particularly mention:

The project “**Promoting Inclusive Parliaments**” is a joint initiative of the UNDP Democratic Governance Group and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. It aims at understanding and promoting the effective representation of indigenous peoples and minorities in parliaments. The project is producing a baseline of information from surveys and interviews. Some of its initial findings put light on the fact that although grassroots movements often campaign most forcefully for indigenous peoples’ rights and inclusion, these movements have not constituted themselves as political parties and thus are not able to present candidates for election.

While all the respondents recognized the obstacles to entering parliament and advancing their legislative interests, there was wide agreement that it was important for indigenous peoples to be represented in parliament as they remain the foremost decision-making bodies in a democracy.

Over the past five years, the **UNDP Regional Initiative on Indigenous Peoples’ Rights and Development (RIPP)**, based in Bangkok, has been carrying out key initiatives that are relevant to indigenous peoples’ participation in decision-making. UNDP’s support has particularly encouraged indigenous women’s political participation by strengthening their capabilities to have a greater say in decisions that have an impact in their lives. Another main component of the Initiative is the application of human rights in the development framework, from the perspective of indigenous peoples.

Since 2009, OHCHR and UNDP in **Ecuador** are supporting the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights in Ecuador for the process of drafting the basic law of coordination and cooperation between indigenous

DRAFT



jurisdiction and the regular jurisdiction. A socio-legal diagnosis was carried out in a participatory manner with the support of 8 indigenous experts in their own communities. The diagnosis found that the existence of various indigenous jurisdictions and their effective applications should be recognized and strengthened.

The **Global Environmental Facility Small Grants Programme**, implemented by UNDP in over 115 countries worldwide, provides grants of up to \$50,000 to non-governmental organizations for projects they design themselves. At least 15 per cent of the projects worldwide are implemented by indigenous peoples' organizations. Priority attention has been given to the development of participatory techniques such as cyber-tracker tools, participatory Geographic Information System and Participatory Videos to hand over control to the communities on project conception, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

UNDP has also pioneered the establishment of mechanisms to strengthen the participation of indigenous peoples in its development projects and processes:

In 2000, UNDP established a Civil Society Advisory Committee comprised of 15 civil society leaders, including the former Chair of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The committee provides advice to the UNDP Administrator and senior management on key policy issues.

Following this example, some country offices have set up national advisory committees or councils to UN Country Teams, including cases where the committees were composed by indigenous representatives. Although some of these committees are not currently active, they served the purpose of opening processes of policy dialogue and collaboration between indigenous peoples and the UN system at the country level. The most recent UN consultative committee was established in **Nicaragua** in 2009 following a two-day dialogue with 20 representatives of the main indigenous peoples and afro-descendants' organizations.

The **United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD)** is a collaborative partnership between the UN Environment Programme, UNDP and the Food and Agriculture Organization. There is wide recognition that REDD will succeed only with the full participation and ownership of indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent communities. This is especially relevant at the local level, where land and other natural resource management decisions are ultimately made. Indigenous peoples and civil society organizations are represented both as members and as observers to the UN-REDD Programme Policy Board, providing leadership, direction and decisions on financial allocations to ensure the overall success of the Programme.

More information about this and other UNDP projects is available in the written contribution submitted by UNDP to the Secretariat of the Expert Mechanism and included in the Website of the OHCHR.

At UNDP, we remain committed to enabling space and promoting the rights of indigenous peoples, particularly at the country level and in close partnership with OHCHR, ILO, to ensure that indigenous peoples contribute to policy making. The basic purpose of human development is to enlarge people's choices. Participation in decisions affecting the life of one's community is indeed central to development with culture and identity and to the principle of self-determination contained in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Thank you.