

NEW ZEALAND MISSION to the UNITED NATIONS

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UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES 1ST SESSION

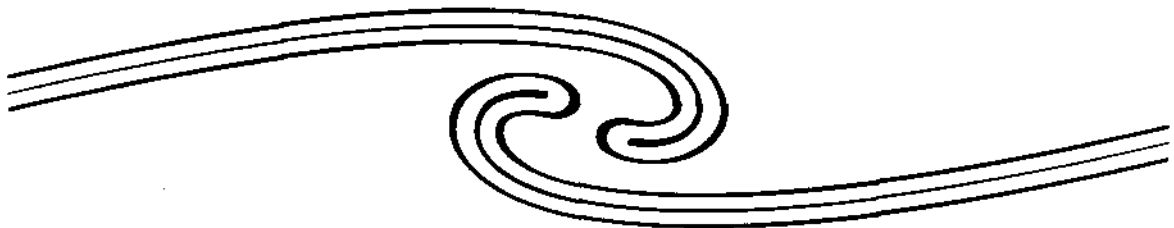
AGENDA ITEM 5: GENERAL DEBATE

STATEMENT BY THE HON. PAREKURA HOROMIA MINISTER OF MAORI AFFAIRS

NEW ZEALAND

MONDAY 13 MAY 2002

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Tihei mauriora, ki te whai ao, ki te ao mārama! (*Sneeze of life, the energy of life, to the pre-dawn to the world of light*)

High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr/Mme Chair, distinguished members of the Forum, fellow delegates.

Before I begin my statement, may I first pay respects to the people of this land who have so warmly welcomed us here, and also to the ancestors who have gone before us but whose presence remains with us today. May I acknowledge, too, those who have worked long and hard to help create this Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. It is truly an honour for me to speak here today and to be part of this historic moment.

For the first time, indigenous peoples are participating in the work of a United Nations body on the same basis as that of States. We are encouraged that representatives of both States and indigenous peoples will work together alongside one another, and believe that this embodies the aim of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. We look forward to seeing indigenous peoples make their own unique contribution to the work of the UN as we move ahead together in a spirit of engagement and co-operation.

We realise that expectations around the world, including from my own country, are high for the Permanent Forum and what it might achieve, but it is important that we are all clear about the Forum's role, which is to advise and to co-ordinate. The mandate of the Forum is a broad one, in being able to discuss concerns relating to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights. But it is one which reflects the fact that the issues facing indigenous peoples today are often complex, inter-related and inseparable.

As to future themes that the Permanent Forum might look at, I am sure that the distinguished members have many useful ideas. Our own suggestions revolve around looking at how best to promote greater participation by indigenous peoples in UN programmes right from the earliest stages. We would also urge that the interests of indigenous women and young people are also taken into account. Whatever the members decide upon, what is important to us is that there be a sound and realistic programme of work that will establish the Forum as an authority on indigenous issues in the UN. Equally important is the process by which this programme of work is undertaken. We hope that there will be good working methods, consensus decision-making, and ways to ensure the voices of states, indigenous peoples and agencies are heard in a constructive manner, so that the members can make informed decisions. Above all, we look to the Permanent Forum to facilitate the delivery of practical outcomes and benefits to indigenous peoples.

For many years, the UN has played a special role with respect to indigenous issues but, as it was noted in the Secretary-General's review of UN mechanisms relating to indigenous peoples in 1996, it is often difficult for indigenous peoples to find their way around the UN system. The Permanent Forum will therefore make an important contribution in helping the UN realise its full potential in working with indigenous

peoples. In establishing a direct dialogue with the agencies which deliver the services, the Forum will be a focal point within the UN where both indigenous peoples and UN agencies can come to exchange information and learn more about what efforts are being made in particular areas.

We believe that this can be achieved because, to us, the Forum is about partnership. Partnership between States, indigenous peoples and the UN. Partnership is an important theme in my country. For a long time, successive New Zealand governments sought to manage Maori development. The traditional strategy had been to focus on Maori as a client. Things, however, are now changing in New Zealand. It is about empowering and enabling Maori to solve their own problems, with the government's role being to build on the strengths of Maori communities and aligning those strengths to the needs of their people. There is a continuing need for indigenous peoples to take leading roles in the economic lives of countries, and indeed in all fields, including science and technology, and this is what my Government is working to promote. We hope some of that philosophy - of working hand in hand with everybody having an active role to play - will be shared by the Permanent Forum.

Like any new infant, the Permanent Forum will need nourishing and a good home. If it is to operate effectively and make an impact, it is vital that the Forum receives the full support and involvement of both States and the relevant specialised agencies, including the provision of necessary technical and financial support. We urge fellow States to demonstrate commitment to the Forum by ensuring that it receives adequate funding from the regular budget.

Resources are not unlimited in the United Nations and we recognise the importance of getting the best out of what we've got. In this respect, we welcome the forthcoming review of indigenous mechanisms in the UN, including the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, with the view to rationalising activities, avoiding duplication and overlap and promoting effectiveness.

To be commended is the work of the Inter-Agency Support Group under the leadership of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in preparing for the first meeting of the Forum. We are already seeing in action agencies co-operating closely together with respect to the Permanent Forum, and we look to the IASG to continue its role as the task of implementing recommendations of the Forum gets underway.

As for the Forum Secretariat, we see it as having an important part to play in terms of assisting with the work of the members, especially in terms of information-gathering and dissemination. While staff numbers need not be large, we hope that they will include indigenous people. We remain flexible about where the Secretariat might be located, but it should be the location that facilitates best the Forum playing its broad advisory and co-ordinating role across the gamut of UN activity, relevant to the ECOSOC mandate. In the meantime, we express our thanks to the interim Secretariat for all its hard work in preparing for this meeting.

For our part, New Zealand has made a financial contribution to the establishment of the Permanent Forum (NZ\$50,000) for the interim Secretariat in New York. We have provided additional support in the form of technical personnel to the OHCHR. We have also made a grant (of NZ\$25,000) to the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations which have been used to assist indigenous representatives attend the Forum. My own attendance here today as a Government Minister reflects the importance New Zealand attaches to the Permanent Forum and also underlines our commitment to indigenous issues more generally in the UN system. The end of the Decade is fast approaching and there is still so much more that needs to be done, so we urge everyone to keep up the momentum.

Members of the Forum, it is New Zealand's intention to assist you in any way we can. We undertake to be an active observer and we will ensure the dissemination of your work back home in New Zealand.

Maori have a saying that goes "Me whakawhitiwhiti kotahi, ka oti te mahi" which in essence means "in working together, we can achieve whatever we have set ourselves".

We look forward to hearing more from our wise members of the Permanent Forum, and we wish you all well in your endeavours.

Nā reira hei ngā māngai o te ao puta noa, tēnā koutou katoa. *(Therefore, representatives of the world, greetings to one and all.)*