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**Statement by
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AND COORDINATOR OF THE SECOND DECADE OF
THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE TO THE SEVENTH SESSION OF
THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES
New York, 1 May 2008**

Madame Chairperson and Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,
Your Excellency, The President of the General Assembly,
Honourable Elders,
Representatives of Member States, Indigenous Organizations, NGOs, UN system partners and
other intergovernmental organizations,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure to join you for the first time at the United Nations Permanent
Forum on Indigenous Issues, as you approach the close of a seventh, successful session.

Each year, the number of stakeholders attending this Forum continues to grow –
Indigenous Peoples Organizations, Members States, NGOs, UN system partners and other
intergovernmental organizations. This reflects the shared conviction that, the many challenges
confronting indigenous peoples around the globe, require concerted effort.

The adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by
the General Assembly last year has raised the profile of indigenous peoples at all levels, from the
local to the global.

The Forum continues in this vein, this year, with its special theme: *"Climate change, bio-
cultural diversity and livelihoods: the stewardship role of indigenous peoples and new
challenges"*. We must recognize that indigenous peoples are among the first to face the direct
consequences of climate change. This is due to their dependence upon and close relationship
with the environment and its resources.

Indigenous peoples live in close contact with and are active in the varied ecosystems of
their lands and territories. Therefore, they are in a position to help safeguard the natural
resilience of these ecosystems. In addition, indigenous peoples interpret and react to climate
change impacts in creative ways, drawing on traditional knowledge and other technologies to
find solutions, which may help society at large to cope with impending changes.

Many constraints persist to achieving the full measure of potential adaptation. In
particular, the integration of adaptation concerns into policy-making continues to be a major

challenge. The need to improve our knowledge of future impacts must not delay action to build the resilience of the most vulnerable in society.

The ability of human systems to adapt to and cope with climate change depends on a number of factors: wealth, technology, education, information, skills, infrastructure, access to resources, and management capabilities. These are often not accessible to many indigenous peoples and their communities.

We need to ensure that, in addressing climate change, adaptation strategies and mitigation measures work to benefit, not marginalize, indigenous peoples. In this regard, indigenous peoples have concerns with respect to dispossession of their lands and threats to their food security.

The Secretary-General has taken a leadership role in helping to spur and shape the global response. I strongly agree with him that the most effective approach for combating the effects of climate change is a holistic one. We must consider its economic, social, and environmental aspects, in an integrated and balanced manner.

While working on behalf of all Member States, the Secretary-General is doing so with particular concern for developing countries, and for the least advantaged people, because climate change will hit them hardest. And they will have the least capacity to fight back.

The time has come for the world to hear indigenous peoples' voices on this great, global challenge. Their particular needs and concerns – and their potential contributions to confronting climate change – must be addressed.

Such a transformation in public discourse and action on climate change would also serve the objectives of the Programme of Action for the Second Decade of the World's Indigenous People:

- to promote non-discrimination;
- to achieve the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in decisions affecting them;
- to redefine development policies to respect the cultural and linguistic diversity of indigenous peoples;
- to adopt targeted policies, programmes, projects and budgets with particular emphasis on indigenous women, children and youth; and
- to strengthen monitoring mechanisms and accountability.

As Coordinator of the Second Decade, I will continue to advocate for concerted action on indigenous issues by UN Country Teams through the UN Development Group (UNDG). Recently, the Group took a very important step in adopting the UNDG Guidelines on Indigenous peoples' Issues for UN Country Teams. The Guidelines aim at integrating indigenous issues in UN operational activities. I would like to thank the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues for its special role in this regard.

I also want to thank the Governments that have contributed to specific activities of the Forum over the past year, especially the Government of Spain, for hosting the pre-sessional meeting in Madrid in February, and the Russian Federation, for hosting two expert meetings.

My appreciation also goes to all the Governments that have made contributions to the Trust Fund on Indigenous Issues – a major vehicle for supporting the Forum's work – and especially to those Governments who continue to do so.

Madame Chairperson,
Distinguished Members of the Forum,

The work of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is invaluable, as it brings together, on the global stage, indigenous peoples, Member States, the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations. This is an opportunity to exchange information, to voice concerns, and to participate in dialogue on important issues, with a view to strengthening partnerships.

I thank you, and I wish the Forum every success in its final deliberations of this Seventh Session.

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