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Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

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Agenda Item: General Statements

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would first like to acknowledge the Indigenous Peoples of this region, and the spirits that have remained here. On behalf of the IITC, I extend respectful greetings to the members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and to all of you who are participating as active observers in this inaugural session of the Forum.

Mr. Chairman, we would like to underscore the Right to Food, and the corollary rights of Food Security and Food Sovereignty, as issues that cut across this session's agenda themes of economic and social development, environment, health, education, culture, and human rights. And few issues demonstrate more clearly the fundamental link between biological diversity and cultural diversity.

Our Right to Food is a human right recognized by three international instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which states in its Article 1 that **all peoples, by virtue of the right to Self Determination, may establish and implement their own economic, social and cultural development, and their own development strategies, based on their own vision, and that "in no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence."** For **Indigenous Peoples, the Right to Food is also a collective right**, linked to millennial ceremonial practices based on our unique spiritual relationship with Mother Earth, and with our lands, territories and environment, all of which nourish our bodies, our cultures, languages, social life and worldviews. **When our Right to Food is denied, our collective Indigenous existence is denied.**

Our self-determination, and our land, water and territory rights are essential for the full realization of our Food Security and Food Sovereignty. The 1996 Plan of Action and the Declaration of the World Food Summit, defines Food Security as "the access of all people to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." Food Sovereignty is defined by civil society as the right of Peoples to determine their own policies and strategies for the sustainable production, distribution, and consumption of food, with respect for their own cultures and their own systems of managing natural resources and rural areas. Food Sovereignty is considered to be a pre-requisite for Food Security.

Starvation, debilitating disease and terminal illnesses are a collective reality shared by Indigenous Peoples throughout the world. The imposition of industrialized agriculture and genetically modified foods erodes the genetic diversity of our seeds and animals, leads to migration of our community members to the cities and force feeds us products that not only fail to nourish us, they often cause diseases, and severe developmental problems and mortality rates among our children.

Last month, at Lake Atitlan in western Guatemala, 125 representatives and traditional authorities of Indigenous Peoples, Nations, and organizations from 28 countries from all regions of the

world, gathered for an Indigenous Peoples' Consultation on the Right to Food. The IITC worked with other Indigenous organizations -- and with primary support from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) -- to bring these Indigenous farmers, gatherers, hunters, fishing peoples, herders and research specialists together to share their common and unique experiences. They developed the Atitlan Declaration, in which they list the obstacles that limit or deny Indigenous Peoples' fundamental Right to Food, and propose a number of practical, action-oriented recommendations.

Rather than list all of the obstacles, I will mention only a few and invite you to read the Atitlan Declaration to see the rest. The framework of globalization and free trade, structural adjustment and other policies of international financial institutions, development without prior, informed consent and the intellectual property rights regime were considered to be primary obstacles.

Many demands are directed to nation states and private industry. But a number of recommendations serve the mandate of the Permanent Forum, such as:

1. That the UN Commission on Sustainable Development and the FAO regularly inform our communities and organizations on their activities and programs through the most accessible media and appropriate languages, and that they support Indigenous Peoples campaigns to inform our communities on our comprehensive Rights, and on our research results on toxins, genetic engineering and the benefits of consuming traditional foods
2. That the FAO establish an open-ended working group so that Indigenous Peoples may consult in the development and implementation of policies that affect our Food Security and Food Sovereignty
3. That international trade and financing entities recognize, respect, and observe human, economic, social, and cultural rights, particularly the rights of Indigenous Peoples
4. That the protection of traditional knowledge be carried out in accordance with the worldviews, values, needs and traditional legal systems of Indigenous Peoples

But the recommendation that is most relevant today reads, "We recommend that the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues accept [the Atitlan] Declaration and propose to the World Summits and agencies of the United Nations System that they incorporate it into their respective plans of action and policies." The IITC has formally submitted the Atitlan Declaration, in English and Spanish, to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Its document number is **E/CN.19/2002/Misc.1**

In addition, we would recommend that the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues:

1. Establish a mechanism of cooperation between the Permanent Forum and the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, recommending that he focus his study on the Right to Food and Food Security of Indigenous Peoples
2. Work with the Commission on Human Rights to promote collaboration among the Special Rapporteurs on the Right to Food, on Health and on Indigenous Peoples Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and on Development, recommending that they focus their studies on Indigenous Peoples
3. Promote within relevant UN agencies the development of studies that provide disaggregated data on the comprehensive health and nutritional status of Indigenous Peoples, and that include cultural indicators for well being

Thank you, all my relations.