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Intervention to the Seventh Session of the UNPFII 2008

Youth Caucus Statement- April ²⁸24, 2008

Agenda Item 5: Human Rights *Kirsti Gussam*

Good afternoon Madame Chair,

This intervention is submitted by the Indigenous Youth Caucus of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues for the Seventh Session, comprised of Indigenous youth from all over the world.

First, we acknowledge our ancestors and those leaders that have come before us. In addition, we acknowledge the traditional custodians of this region for allowing us to meet in their respective homeland. We give thanks to our relatives, the mountains, lakes, rivers, seas and all living beings that have inhabited this earth and provide us with the means to survive. We would also like to give thanks to all states that have accepted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and taken the first steps in a long walk of renewal and relationship building, and we encourage those that haven't to do so.

The Indigenous Youth caucus would like to address the UNPFII and the wide range of human right violations that Indigenous peoples face worldwide and in particular, Indigenous youth. As a whole Indigenous peoples face an inability to speak our indigenous languages, as stated previously by the youth caucus, a long list of environmental and health violations, an inability to identify and be recognized as peoples, blatant genocidal policies, state sanctioned repression of self-determination, racism, educational and institutional oppression, and the list goes on and on. Indigenous youth are particularly vulnerable to these human rights violation. These violations contribute to internalized self-hatred, the result of which contributes to the high numbers of suicide, alcoholism, and drug abuse among our youth.

Indigenous youth are precious commodities and make up over 50% of the world's indigenous population. Despite our large population our voices, concerns, and distinct experiences are often rendered invisible and or under-represented. Leaders/governments try to suffocate our voices on our issues and problems that we carry with us in our everyday lives. We, the Indigenous youth are the frontlines of our struggles, in Balochistan, Tyendinaga, Kenya, Burma, Tibet, Columbia, New Zealand, Lybia, on and on and world wide. Indigenous youth activists are being labeled as insurgents and terrorists. We are not terrorists, we guided by our previous generations, elders and teachers carrying the sacred responsibility to maintain our culture, and to defend our precious mother earth. In addition, this problem is compounded by high infant mortality rates within indigenous communities. We are dying on the frontlines, we are dying in our communities, we the Indigenous youth are dying before our time.

We have the right to life and fundamental freedoms; we have the right to safety, security, culture, and dignity. However, our rights under the Declaration of Indigenous Peoples are not being made readily available to Indigenous youth. We continually find that our rights are compromised and violated in the name of national progress, development, and natural resources extraction. In order for indigenous nations to survive indigenous youth justice must be given priority and we must be seen as contributors to indigenous survival and the discourse of indigenous human rights. Now is the time for our elders and leaders to work with our young Indigenous peoples.

We respectively offer the following recommendations:

- 1) For Nation-States to fully implement Article 7 and 8 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of indigenous peoples.
- 2) For the UN to encourage and ensure that State governments impart the information within the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to Indigenous youth.
- 3) For Nation-States to recognize and fully incorporate Indigenous youth voice into the discourse of human rights violations.
- 4) For the UN to encourage Nation-States to educate their populations on the rights of Indigenous peoples.

In conclusion,

We are all interconnected and have responsibility to uphold our rights together. Indigenous youth issues aren't just indigenous youth issues, they are community issues, community issues aren't just community issues but our Nations issues, and we need to address them together as a whole. We encourage the forum to help us become the leaders of today and tomorrow and help our nations and culture survive.