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**MEETING OF CHAIRPERSONS OF THE FUNCTIONAL
COMMISSIONS OF ECOSOC**

New York, 7 July 2005

**Address by Ms Victoria Tauli-Corpuz
Chairperson of the United Nations Permanent forum on Indigenous Issues**

“Achieving the internationally agreed upon development goals, including those contained in the Millenium Declaration, as well as implementing the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits: progress made, challenges and opportunities.”

Mr. Chairperson, dear Colleagues,

I am very pleased to participate at this meeting today. The Permanent Forum, as you know, is a new body, has only held four sessions until now. Although we are not a functional commission *per se*, but rather an expert body of the Council, we are happy to be part of these consultations for various reasons. First of all, it is part of our mandate is to promote coordination on indigenous issues in the UN system and also to promote integration/mainstreaming of these issues in the UN. **It is therefore crucial for me , as the Chairperson, and for all my colleagues in the Forum and in the Secretariat to be in dialogue with the other subsidiary bodies of the Council and explore how we, together, can help improve the lives of the more than 370 million indigenous people around the world, one of the most marginalized parts of humanity.**

I note with satisfaction that regular contacts with the Bureau of the Council take place, including the meeting held between the Bureau of ECOSOC and the Bureau of the Forum during its session in last May. These dialogues are crucial for the Forum to effectively fulfill its mandate.

Secondly, even if the Forum is new, representatives of indigenous peoples and organizations have been actively participating in the major UN conferences and summits and in the sessions of most of your Commissions. Before I became a member and the Chairperson of the Forum, I have been the convenor of the Indigenous Peoples' Caucus of the Commission on Sustainable Development since it was set up. Tebtebba, the NGO I represented played a lead role in evolving the Dialogue papers presented in the policy sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development. In Johannesburg, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, we lobbied very hard to ensure that the vital role of indigenous peoples in sustainable development is reaffirmed.. At the recent session of the Commission on the Status of Women, there was a significant participation of indigenous women and this resulted into the adoption of a recommendation specifically addressing them. The participation of indigenous peoples in these summits ensured the integration of some indigenous issues in the final outcomes and it is now the responsibility of the Permanent Forum to help ensure that relevant recommendations are implemented

We realize of course that not everything can be accomplished at once and that some of the ideas take time to be delivered and understood. For this reason in 2003 we asked ECOSOC to ask all its commissions to invite the PFII to be represented at relevant meetings. For example, this year, the Chairperson of the UN Forum on Forests invited me to speak during the UNFF session and it was a great pleasure for me to do this. We also hosted him in our fourth session last May. We were also very honoured to host the Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women at our 2004 session, which had "Indigenous Women" as its special theme and the Chair of the Commission on Sustainable Development in the 2003 Session. In the future, **the Forum is looking forward to a similar participation at the meetings of the other functional commissions as well. We will also continue inviting other commissions to participate**

in the future sessions of the Forum. We believe that this is one way of allowing for cross-fertilization between the different commissions and subsidiary bodies of the ECOSOC.

We are grateful to some ECOSOC Member States **for creating a loose formation called Friends of the Forum as well as the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues.**

Looking at the mandates of the commissions represented around this table, I see that all are relevant to indigenous peoples, although I am aware that not all have had equally been exposed to these issues. Since the Permanent Forum is expected to make recommendations to the UN system on development, environment, health, education, culture and human rights, the Forum is engaged in analysing various areas of the UN's work, to see how relevant are these for indigenous peoples. Various subjects relevant to your mandates, such as gender, the social and environmental consequences of development policies on indigenous peoples, the Millenium Development Goals, human rights concerns of indigenous peoples, and the issue of data collection and disaggregation, free, prior and informed consent, among others, have been substantially discussed in the sessions and expert working groups of the Forum. All the recommendations which emerged from these processes are contained in our reports and I encourage you to please read these reports as these have important references to your commissions. We also read the reports of your commissions to analyse the interface between the policies and programs which emerge from your annual sessions and those from ours.

The PF has been improving its **methods of work** on a continuous basis. I could highlight a few which are especially relevant to our meeting today:

- 1) The Forum's Bureau has an active inter-sessional role.
- 2) The Forum has distributed thematic portfolios among its members in order to deepen the analysis and the understanding of relevant issues; this has proven a very useful practice.
- 3) The Forum has held brief pre-sessional meetings and believes that this is particularly important when the membership changes every three years;
- 4) The Forum tries to be in synch with major themes in the United Nations and make its strategic contributions to those. The Forum has chosen special themes for its 2nd and 3rd sessions in order to provide focus within its very broad mandate and has organized high-level panels on those themes. The 3rd session's special theme was "Indigenous Women", which, apart from its crucial importance, was the Forum's contribution to the Beijing+10 process through the comprehensive recommendations adopted . At its 4th and 5th sessions in 2005 and 2006 the Forum is focusing on MDGs to ensure that indigenous peoples are not left out of this global effort.

5) The Forum has decided to place considerable focus on follow up and implementation of its recommendations of its first four sessions, which in essence constitute a multi-year programme of work.

6) The Forum has decided to appoint special rapporteurs among its members to deal with the consolidation of its recommendations over the past years, with methods of work and with strengthening cooperation with the Forum on Forests.

Dear Colleagues,

Our commissions form part of one machinery, that of the Economic and Social Council. We have made progress in connecting with each other, but more can be achieved.

I would like to reiterate some practical recommendations that will hopefully enhance our collaboration further:

- 1) A system should be established so that the secretariats of the functional commissions regularly transmit to other commissions multi-year programmes of work and agendas of future sessions;**
- 2) Joint meetings of Bureaux and their secretariats should be instituted, and budgetary provisions should be made from the regular budget to that effect; such meetings should discuss coordination and how to promote multi-disciplinary approaches on subjects of common concern;**
- 3) Commissions, through their secretariats, should distribute to the other commissions resolutions and recommendations of special relevance to each commission.**
- 4) Given its mandate to promote mainstreaming of indigenous issues, the other commissions should extend invitations to the Permanent Forum to participate at relevant meetings and the Forum should do the same.**

The Forum's mandate is very broad, its financial resources limited, while the problems and needs of indigenous peoples as well as their expectations from the international community are immense. We at the United Nations cannot afford to disappoint them, they are a devoted constituency for the UN, as their attendance of UN meetings in large numbers testifies. While the Forum is a new body, indigenous issues are established at the UN since the 1970s. A major problem though has been the marginalization of indigenous issues in public policies.

The Forum has thus been keen to engage the UN system and other inter-governmental organizations to include indigenous issues in their work. We realize that while this may mean more resources in some cases, in many others it is a question "not of more, but of how things are done", and we hope that the PF's recommendations, in dialogue with agencies, can contribute to new approaches. This year, for example, we were pleased to receive some 40 documents from the UN system, states and NGOs on their work on indigenous issues and to have the participation of some 33 UN-system and

intergovernmental entities, along with some 1200 participants from indigenous and other civil society organizations and about 68 states.

Throughout the recommendations the Forum has wisely stressed the importance of a **regional focus** and of approaching the mobilization of solutions at that level, in order to become increasingly more concrete in bringing solutions to indigenous communities. The Forum wishes to engage all regional inter-governmental organizations in this effort.

We have also realized that the Forum's annual session is a nodal point for catalytic action and contacts at various levels. The Forum's lively meetings at its fourth session have been complemented by more than 50 side events, showing the vitality and engagement of its constituencies, indigenous peoples, the UN system, governments and the media.

The machinery of commissions to which the Permanent Forum is a new-comer has to function as one family, to the benefit of economic and social development around the world. We have made progress in connecting with each other within this machinery, but more can be achieved, and I and other colleagues have made some recommendations at the earlier meetings we had among commission chairpersons and with the Bureau of ECOSOC. As a new body of the Council, while we have been trying to work together within the UN system, with indigenous peoples and governments to improve situations of millions and millions indigenous peoples, we would like to share with you briefly the work and challenges ahead of us.

Challenges

First of all, in terms of challenges, the Forum believes that internationally agreed development goals, which includes the Millenium Declaration, as well as the outcomes of the major UN Conferences and Summits are relevant to indigenous peoples. The biggest challenge, however, remains to be how to implement the recommendations and outcomes so these will change the situation of marginalization and oppression of indigenous peoples. In our Fourth session, we have identified that the major weaknesses of the MDGs is that these are not framed within a human-rights based framework and indigenous peoples are invisible in both the goals and most MDG country reports. **The Forum, therefore, recommended that the implementation of a human-rights based approach to development and the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in designing, implementing and monitoring development programmes, policies and projects, including the MDGs and poverty reduction strategies, should be ensured by countries and UN bodies, agencies and funds.**

The outcomes of UN summits and conferences and the existing international human rights instruments should not be set aside because everybody's attention is on the MDGs. Achieving MDGs should not be done at the expense of indigenous peoples. There are evidences which show that policies and programs adopted to eradicate poverty of the dominant population have resulted into the further marginalization of indigenous peoples.

A World Bank study on “Indigenous Peoples and Poverty” made from 1994-2004 and which was presented at the Forum’s fourth session, has shown that poverty among indigenous peoples worsened in the five countries where this was done. (Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala and Nicaragua). Concern was raised that the privatization of water, health, environmental and education services has made these services even less accessible to indigenous peoples. The same issues around water and environmental services were raised by indigenous peoples at the Commission on Sustainable Development which has devoted its sessions in the past two years on water and sanitation.

Even the programs to achieve universal primary education can further alienate indigenous children from their cultures, identities and traditional knowledge, especially if these do not support bilingual and intercultural education. It was stressed in the Forum, therefore, that education should not undermine the identities, languages, cultures and traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and strongly supported that bilingual and intercultural education as well as a review of national curricula and education materials to purge these of discriminatory content. **If governments claim that there is no budget to do these, then some portion of the aid money should be targeted for the development of such policies and programmes.**

The five key themes which emerged from the Forum’s discussion on MDGs has highlighted the following as the additional challenges we face:

- How to ensure that the principles of non-discrimination, equality and inclusion guide the implementation of MDGs.
- Facilitating the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples.
- How to undertake development which respects indigenous cultures and identities. Development perspectives of indigenous peoples should be the framework upon which any development intervention is done.
- How to develop targeted programmes and budgets for indigenous peoples with special emphasis on women , children and youth.
- Strengthening monitoring and evaluation which includes the development of social and poverty indicators which are relevant for indigenous peoples. Ensuring the accountability of governments and the fulfillment of their obligations to international human rights instruments and integration of such in the development work for indigenous peoples.

It was also stressed that the Permanent Forum should continue to discuss methods of implementing its recommendations at the regional and national level. In an effort to identify challenges and increase collaboration at the regional level, the Forum hosted region special events at its Fourth session and will host additional regional special events at its Fifth session. Further regions will be covered in the next session; a half day discussion will be devoted to Africa in the plenary sessions of next year. UNICEF’s Regional Office for Latin America and Caribbean in Panama has decided to host the Inter-Agency Support Group meeting in September 2005 in an effort to strengthen the link between the Forum and the work of the UN system at the regional and country levels.

Regarding the work on indigenous issues at national level, the Forum expresses its views that indigenous perspectives should be integrated in the UN Country Teams' work including the CCA/UNDAF (Common Country Assessment/United Nations Development Assistance Framework), the country reports on MDGs and poverty reduction strategy papers. In this regard, lots remain to do.

We have in front of us a key opportunity for the Forum, as well as for the ECOSOC is the Second International Decade for the World's Indigenous Peoples. A comprehensive program of action is currently under preparation based on comments and discussions of the Fourth Session. The duration of the Second Decade (2005-2015) will coincide with the target date of achieving the Millennium Development Goals, hence the program of action of the Second Decade should be seriously taken into consideration in the Millennium Review and implementation process.

Mr. Chairperson, dear Colleagues,

When the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan came to address the Forum at its Third Session in May 2003, he reiterated his commitment by saying that, I quote "The pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 highlights the importance of these partnerships. Indigenous peoples continue to suffer disproportionately from extreme poverty, child mortality, poor maternal health, barriers to primary education, and infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria. As part of our global effort to overcome these problems, we must develop schemes that specifically target indigenous peoples. The UN will play its part in helping Member States try to transform those MDGs into indigenous realities."

The Forum is committed to work towards this direction together with all UN machinery and partners, and we believe that partnership in action will make these realities happen.