

**Statement by H.E. Ms. Marjatta Rasi,
President of the Economic and Social Council,
at the opening of the third session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

10 May 2004

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the Permanent Forum, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to address the opening of the third session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in my capacity as President of the Economic and Social Council. Having closely followed the activities of the Forum over the previous sessions, I speak from experience when I wholeheartedly congratulate you on your achievements so far, and reaffirm my commitment to working with you also in the future.

The Permanent Forum, established by ECOSOC only four years ago, is fast becoming an indispensable part of the UN system, a focal point for indigenous issues at the UN and a meeting place for indigenous peoples, member states and other stakeholders the world over. Over its first two years, the Forum has already made notable progress in raising awareness of indigenous issues throughout the UN, acting as a catalyst for different agencies - "energizing the UN system", as the High Commissioner for Human Rights put it in his statement to the second session of the Forum.

The interactive role of the Forum in gathering the views of different parties is unique, and the participatory nature of its meetings commendable. The co-operation witnessed here between the members of the Forum and representatives of non-governmental organisations and member states, exemplifies the kind of "partnership in action" called for in the motto of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. Also, it has been extremely gratifying to note the high degree of interest shown by UN specialised agencies, funds and programmes, and the World Bank, in the work of the Forum. That interest, to me, is proof of the success of the format adopted for the Forum at its inception four years ago.

The important contributions the Permanent Forum is making to the work of ECOSOC and the whole UN system are the result of a genuine team effort, but a number of parties deserve a special mention. Firstly, I would like to express my appreciation for the Chairman of the Forum, Mr. Ole Henrik Magga, for his able and efficient leadership over these first crucial years of the Forum. Secondly, thanks are due to all the other members of the Forum who have helped to make the Forum what it is today - a well-functioning, well-established member of the UN family. Thirdly, I would like to acknowledge the indispensable input of the Secretariat of the Forum, who have worked tirelessly and with very limited resources to assist the Forum in its tasks. Fourthly, and finally, the important role played by the Inter-Agency Support Group for the Permanent Forum especially in the context of implementation of the Forum's recommendations, should be noted.

These thanks are especially pertinent today, as we are embarking on the last session of the Forum with its current membership. As you know, the Economic and Social Council, at its resumed organisational session last Tuesday, elected the members of the Forum for the years 2005–2007. I trust that the new members of the Forum will have the benefit of the experience of and continued co-operation with the current members, and I hope to see all of you here next year as well.

Mr. Chairman, dear friends,

In conclusion, I would like to wish you the best of success in your deliberations over the next two weeks, particularly on the priority theme of this session, indigenous women. The Economic and Social Council is looking forward to examining your recommendations on this important topic at its substantive session in July.

Thank you.