

**Press Release from the Chairperson of the United Nations Permanent Forum on
Indigenous Issues Regarding the Recent Events in Bolivia**

Recalling the message delivered to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues by the President of Bolivia, Evo Morales Ayma, on 21 April 2008; noting that the Forum warmly welcomed the presence of President Morales and recognized the achievements of his government in the recognition, promotion, protection and fulfillment of indigenous peoples' human rights; considering that the mandate of President Morales and his constitutional government was democratically reaffirmed through the referendum celebrated in August 2008, the President of the Permanent Forum, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, expresses grave concern over the recent developments in Bolivia.

We note that violence and racism have been unleashed against the indigenous peoples of the departments of Santa Cruz, Tarija, Beni and Pando with the purpose of ensuring and increasing the control over lands and resources by a small minority and perpetuating the existence of captive indigenous communities in the Amazon and the Chaco. This represents a gross violation of human rights.

These violent acts have been taking place since 9 September with the collusion, to say the least, of local authorities. The most egregious events have taken place in the department of Pando, where peasants, students, children, women and unionists, mainly indigenous, were victims of an ambush that caused human loss and has left a number of people wounded. This atmosphere of terror and threats has forced an indeterminate number of people in Pando and other departments to go into hiding. The offices of indigenous organizations, government agencies, human rights NGOs and news media have been ransacked or destroyed.

The Chairperson of the Permanent Forum fervently adds her voice to the concerns raised by the international community, renewing support for the democratically elected constitutional government of Bolivia. We call upon the President and government of Bolivia to hold firm to their policies of recognition, promotion, protection and fulfillment of human rights, particularly indigenous peoples' rights, by taking all legal measures required to put an end to these violent acts, as well as to locate and bring to justice, under due process, those responsible. The Chairperson of the Forum also calls upon the responsible parties to cease these criminal acts immediately.

This statement is endorsed by the Chairperson of the Permanent Forum, Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, and Forum Members Mr. Carlos Mamani Condori and Ms. Margaret Lokawua, who have participated at the annual meeting of the United Nations Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues.

18 September 2008