

31 January 2005

**STATEMENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON  
INDIGENOUS ISSUES ON THE TSUNAMI DISASTER**

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is greatly saddened by the death and suffering caused by the Tsunami disaster in South and South East Asia, and parts of Africa. Reports received indicate that many indigenous peoples in Aceh province of Indonesia and in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala in India are severely affected. Many of them have been internally displaced from their natural habitats, while others living in remote locations have not been able to adequately access humanitarian aid. The loss of habitat often results in the loss of identity and self-preservation of these communities since indigenous livelihood systems are closely interdependent with their natural environment. It is important for the international community to recognize the particular vulnerability of these indigenous peoples and make sure that they are not forgotten or neglected.

The Permanent Forum expresses its appreciation to the international community for the overwhelming humanitarian response to this disaster, and reiterates the importance of the UN in leading the coordination of all efforts. It further appeals to the international community and the governments of affected countries to promote access to indigenous peoples and ensure that they receive adequate and appropriate humanitarian aid, without any distinction as to whether they live in conflict situations. The Permanent Forum notes that some indigenous peoples managed to survive because of their traditional knowledge and management resource practices which conserved mangrove forests. It is crucial to make indigenous communities and organizations full partners in the formulation of rehabilitation and reconstruction programs so that they may advise on how best to utilize their traditional knowledge, resource management systems, and vision of development towards sustainable recovery programs. Although it is imperative to develop regional mechanisms for surveillance, early warning, and prevention assessments of natural disasters, community participation, education and training is equally critical to minimize the impact of potential natural disasters.

The Permanent Forum will engage actively, within its authority and mandate, with UN bodies and agencies which are involved in the rehabilitation and reconstruction programs to ensure that they will appropriately address affected indigenous peoples and communities.