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ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Expert Group Meeting on
Indigenous Languages: Preservation and Revitalization:
Articles 13, 14 and 16 of the
United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

19 – 21 January 2016, New York

Distinguished Chairperson and Members of the Permanent Forum on
Indigenous Issues,

Distinguished Chairperson of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of
Indigenous Peoples

Distinguished experts,

Distinguished representatives of Member States, indigenous peoples and the UN
system,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr. Montiel speaking in kichwa

Translation

*Mashikuna, ashkata kushillakani
kikinkunata kay jatun
mamallaktakunapak wasibi rikusha.
Kikinkuna sumak rimarikunayda
charipashkanguichik kay kimsa
punllapi. Ñukami shuk AbyaYala
llaktamanda kani, chaymanda
napani runashimipi kikinkunada.*

*It is a pleasure to join you here. I
know that you have had very
interesting and stimulating
discussions over the past three days.
As I am from one of the countries of
the Latin American region I wanted
to greet you in the Kichwa language.*

Last year was an extraordinary year at the United Nations, where the highlights were undoubtedly the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris agreement on climate change. These are fundamental agreements that will guide the efforts of the international community for the next 15 years and will direct our work in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

I know that indigenous representatives were active in the consultation and preparation process for these agreements and that you would have preferred stronger references to indigenous peoples. Similar concerns have also been raised by other groups including persons with disabilities, older persons, youth, minorities and many others. In response to these legitimate concerns, the Secretary-General has made “leave no one behind” the rallying cry for the sustainable development goals. We have to make sure that indigenous peoples are not left behind.

The Secretary-General visited our department on the first day of work in the New Year. His message to the staff was brief and to the point - now is the time for implementation. The agreements have been made, the negotiations have been concluded and we now have a clear development agenda. Now is the time for action.

Ladies and gentlemen. It is a pleasure to tell you that the United Nations has an action plan to improve our work on indigenous issues. This was prepared in response to the outcome document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, with the active cooperation of a number of UN agencies, and after consulting with indigenous peoples and Member States.

The system wide action plan was developed under the leadership of

Mr. Wu Hongbo, the Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, as the senior UN official to follow up on the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. This is a task that Mr. Wu and all of us in DESA take very seriously. We have put a great deal of effort into developing the UN system wide action plan and the onus now is to implement the action plan.

In this we also look to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues which has the specific mandate to promote the integration and coordination of activities related to indigenous peoples within the UN system. We look forward to working with the Permanent Forum on the implementation of the Action Plan to achieve the ends of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Turning now to the theme of this meeting. Languages are our modes of communication. It is how we convey our thoughts, our cultures and our traditions. Yet, many indigenous languages are under threat of dying out. Maintaining and revitalizing indigenous languages is essential to keep our shared cultural heritage. It is the preservation of invaluable wisdom, traditional knowledge and expressions of art and beauty, and we have to make sure that we do not lose this.

This is a very important meeting, and has generated a lot of interest. I understand you have identified key recommendations and findings to carry forward this work. Your wisdom and expertise on the preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages will help guide the work of the United Nations, so that we can provide the necessary support for efforts at the national level to revitalize indigenous languages.

I would like to thank the invited experts; the Chair and the members of the Permanent Forum; the members of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; the Rapporteur from UNESCO and the staff of the Secretariat

of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous for all the behind the scenes work they have done to make this session happen including all the offices involved. Special thanks to the interpreters.

Thank you all for sharing your knowledge, experience and suggestions so generously. I look forward to our joint efforts to make sure indigenous languages continue to survive.

[The meeting is now closed.]

Yupaychani [in Kichwa] Thank you