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Distinguished Assistant Secretary-General, Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,

Distinguished Representatives of Member States, Indigenous Peoples, UN system entities, and civil society.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my honour to welcome you to the 20th session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The special theme of this session is “Peace, justice and strong institutions: the role of indigenous peoples in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16”.

The aim of Sustainable Development Goal 16 is to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

This is a lofty goal. We have our work cut out for us these next two weeks. Our task is to engage in constructive dialogue - indigenous peoples, member states and UN agencies – to discuss:

- what needs to be done to create more peaceful and just societies?
- how do we guarantee access to justice for all?
- what do effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions look like?

And to propose concrete, actionable recommendations that will move us toward the realization of this goal.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples makes clear that indigenous peoples have both individual and collective rights. It spells them out very clearly. Unfortunately, and far too often, indigenous peoples around the

world continue to suffer serious violations of both our individual human rights, and our collective rights as peoples. Our lands continue to be taken from us for mining, logging, oil and gas exploration, industrial agriculture, and for carrying out large-scale infrastructure projects. We continue to be displaced from our ancestral territories, causing irreparable harm to livelihoods, cultures, languages, and lives. Sometimes these assaults are committed by state forces - sometimes by private militias; often by a combination of the two.

As many of the current threats to peace and security relate to conflicts over natural resources, it is worth noting that - for millennia - we have successfully and sustainably managed our territories and resources and, if we are to avoid conflict, we must be allowed to continue doing so. Peace and security cannot be achieved without the full recognition of indigenous peoples' rights.

Although we can find some examples where states and indigenous peoples have constructively engaged to develop peace accords - such as in the Chittagong Hills Tracts , Guatemala and Colombia - implementation of these agreements has too often been lacking and indigenous peoples have continued to suffer violence and marginalization.

I would like to emphasize that the lack of implementation of these accords is not the fault of indigenous peoples. We have consistently shown ourselves to be constructive partners in maintaining peace and security, and we not only welcome increased engagement with governments and the international community to work together to build peace, we insist upon it.

Realizing SDG 16 does not only involve prevention of conflict, but also necessitates ensuring personal security and respect for our fundamental human rights such as freedom from violence, fear, and discrimination. I am particularly concerned about violence against indigenous women and girls. In too many countries and communities, indigenous women and girls are subjected to violence and are murdered or go missing. In North America this is such a problem that there is now an acronym for it! MMIW – Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women. In Canada there is a Highway of Tears, named for the dozens of women who have been murdered along just one stretch of a road. It says something about our societies and priorities that such heinous crimes are so common and are committed with such impunity.

But let me be clear. Violence against indigenous women and girls is not just confined to North America, it is a problem everywhere. As is impunity for the

perpetrators of this violence. We see this in my home country of Sapmi as well as in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In this light, I welcome the establishment, by Secretary Deb Haaland, of a new Missing and Murdered Unit in the United States Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs that is tasked with investigating and solving these cases. I look forward to following the progress of this unit, as I look forward to cooperating with Secretary Haaland, the first Native American cabinet Secretary in United States history, to advance indigenous peoples' rights around the world.

Violence against indigenous human rights and environmental defenders is another major concern. At least 331 human rights defenders were killed in 2020, two thirds of whom were working on environmental and Indigenous Peoples' rights. Most of these murders happened in a handful of countries with Colombia accounting for more than half and an alarming number in the Philippines, Brazil, Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala. As in the case of murdered indigenous women, we see impunity for the overwhelming majority of these crimes.

These atrocities do not happen in a vacuum. As governments increasingly criminalize the activities of indigenous peoples' organizations and use anti-terrorism legislation to delegitimize their human rights activism, we see a sharp rise in violence against indigenous human rights defenders. This must stop. These actions are clear violations of internationally recognized human rights law, and they make our societies less stable, less secure, and less equal.

As the world begins to recover from the global COVID-19 pandemic, there is talk about building back better; about addressing climate change and the severe inequalities that the pandemic has made clear for us all to see. But if we are to build back better then we must go beyond lip service and genuinely ensure that no one is left behind. If we are to build back better, indigenous peoples must have a voice in all decisions that affects them. This means recognizing indigenous peoples' right to self-determination and their collective rights to lands, territories, resources, and knowledge. These rights must be respected, both at the country level and at the international level.

In this regard I want to thank the President of the General Assembly for his statement, and I hope that he will be soon appoint facilitators from Member States and Indigenous Peoples to move forward with a process aimed at enhancing the participation of indigenous peoples in the United Nations system. This is important. We Indigenous Peoples have time and again shown ourselves to be constructive partners with Member States. We enrich the work of the United

Nations. Let us build on this and find a way for the United Nations to finally recognize indigenous peoples' representative institutions as the serious partners that they are.

Again, I thank you all for joining us. I look forward to the deliberations over the next two weeks; to hearing from Indigenous Peoples, Member States and UN agencies and to working with you all in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect.

Thank you.