

14 May 2007

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,
at the 6th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to participate in the opening ceremony of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

I am delighted that so many representatives of indigenous peoples have come to the United Nations from all around the world to participate in the Sixth session of the Forum. I am aware that many of you have traveled great distances to be here.

Excellencies,

The General Assembly first opened its doors to indigenous peoples at a ceremony to launch the International Year of the World's Indigenous People in December 1992.

Then in 1995, the United Nations launched the first International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. And, last year marked the beginning of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

This partnership and cooperation demonstrate the General Assembly's continuing commitment to the world's indigenous people.

The Permanent Forum is in many ways a unique body at the United Nations. It has been the source of thought-provoking dialogue and has produced concrete recommendations. The active engagement of indigenous peoples in the Forum has been vital in this regard, raising awareness of indigenous issues throughout the United Nations system and among Member States.

But there is much more that needs to be done. Indigenous peoples continue to face marginalization, extreme poverty and other human rights violations. They are often dragged into conflicts and land disputes that threaten their way of life and very survival. Indigenous peoples also suffer from a lack of access to healthcare, and education.

However, we should not cast indigenous peoples as victims. They are a dynamic collection of communities. Indigenous peoples continue to be a source of inspiration to us all. Their knowledge, culture and environmentalism offer lessons that all of us can learn from.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I have held many meetings with Member States, NGOs, and with representatives of indigenous peoples regarding the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. As President of the General Assembly, I would like to assure you of my continued commitment to reach common ground on this important matter.

Please remember that the doors of the United Nations are always open to the indigenous peoples of the world. Your presence has and will continue to enrich this organization so that we can become more diverse, more inclusive and more vibrant.

I wish you all a productive Sixth Session.

Thank you very much.