

**STATEMENT OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COUNCIL TO THE SECOND SESSION OF THE PERMANENT FORUM ON
INDIGENOUS ISSUES**

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be able to participate in this closing ceremony of your meeting. I was unable to join you during the inauguration, due to my absence from New York, which impeded me at the time from associating myself with the work of the Forum. I thus want to reaffirm my commitment to its work on this occasion, and to continue supporting the Forum's work in the future.

I also would like to take the opportunity to extend my warm greetings to President Ole Henrik Magga, the other members of the Permanent Forum, and the impressive number of representatives of indigenous populations gathered here.

I have had the opportunity of following your activities during the past two weeks, and want to commend all of you for contributing to give real substance to the work of the Permanent Forum. It has been a participatory exercise, and it has been a highly productive exercise, which offers a solid basis to build on for the future.

I would like to highlight some of the activities of the past two weeks, which I believe are significant both in their own right and in furthering the broader goals of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary organs.

In the first place, I welcome the participatory nature of this meeting. The fact that so many non-governmental organizations have been able to express their concerns, and, more importantly, their policy-oriented proposals, has, to my mind, been a very constructive development. Among other aspects, it has been an eloquent testimony to the "partnership in action", which has been the motto of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

In the second place, for anyone who walked into this room during the past two weeks, it was obvious that the Forum had, to paraphrase the Secretary-General, "rolled up its sleeves" and was working hard to implement its mandate; I might add, in a very orderly, efficient and collegial manner.

Thirdly, note should be taken that the Forum is developing its working methods in a pragmatic and highly constructive mode, as circumstances dictate. Noteworthy are the manner in which time was distributed between the different priority topics, and also between the open and closed meetings. In the same vein, the Forum has apparently found that the organization of panels is useful, as evidenced by the high-level panel to deal with indigenous children and youth. This is a format we frequently use in the Council.

Fourth, I note that in addition to the six priority themes on the Forum's agenda, several cross-cutting issues were dealt with, such as gender and women's issues, administration of justice, budget and finance, housing, data and statistics, communications, the protection of traditional knowledge and indigenous intellectual property.

Fifth, it is also noteworthy that a strong constituency is developing which could be broadly classified as a coalition of friends of the Permanent Forum. This coalition naturally does not endorse each and every decision of the Forum, but does support the general premise that the Forum is an important element for bringing the concerns of indigenous populations into the mainstream of the United Nations' agenda, especially in the economic and social spheres. Among the "Friends" mentioned, I include member governments, specialized agencies, and, of course, civil society. In this regard, the work of the Inter-agency Support Group for the Permanent Forum should be mentioned, especially in the context of implementation of the Forum's recommendations

Finally, I want to pick up on one element that has been put on the table by my Latin American colleagues, and that is the potential utility of bringing the regional dimension into the work of the Permanent Forum. There are commonalities among the indigenous peoples of our own region – and, I suspect, of all other regions – that merit promoting some activities at the regional and even sub-regional level, which could subsequently feed into the work of the Forum.

On a different topic, I would like to express my appreciation to our fledgling Secretariat for its work, and pledge my support to further strengthen its capacity. Hopefully, further funds will be forthcoming for this purpose, both from the regular budget and from voluntary contributions.

To close, Mr. President, I hope that we can develop a close working relationship between the Forum and the ECOSOC. I have taken note of the possibility of dedicating a high-level segment of a future ECOSOC meeting to the consideration of a general or specific topic generated in this body, and I am sure that such a possibility would be received with great interest on the part of the members of the Council.

Mr. President,
Dear friends:

You have gotten off to a good start, but your work has only begun. Millions of indigenous people continue to be marginalized in extreme poverty and disempowerment and see their human rights violated.

The Permanent Forum, together with States and indigenous peoples, supported by the Economic and Social Council and the whole United Nations system, is helping to create a vision of another world, a world where this marginalization will no longer be part of our reality. Your determined and wise advice will show the way.

The Economic and Social Council is looking forward to the report of your Second Session and to supporting you in the years to come. And I hope, Mr. Chairperson, that you will be able to come and present the Permanent Forum's report to the Council in July.

Thank you.