

**Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Fifth Session
UNFPA's Intervention
Luz Angela Melo Human Rights Adviser
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**Mme Chair
Distinguished members of the Forum**

UNFPA wants to express its gratitude to the members of the Forum and to the Secretariat for allowing us to participate in the Forum and have this great opportunity to listen to your concerns and to learn from your wisdom.

UNFPA recognizes the greater role that the outcome document and the recommendations issued by this Forum play in advancing the standards related to indigenous' rights and their relevance for the work in the field of UN agencies such as the one that I am representing today.

The Forum conclusions and recommendations constitute human rights standards that provide unique guidelines for programming purposes and UNFPA use them, mainly in the Latin American and Caribbean region, to design its programmes and activities.

UNFPA has a very successful track record in working with Ministries of Health and Education, of Social Development parliamentarians, as well as NGOs and academic institutions in championing the rights of indigenous peoples to reproductive health, so that services are delivered in a manner that respects and responds to their social and cultural values and worldviews.

As you may aware, Mme Chair, UNFPA works with a relevant but difficult to understand agenda, even more difficult these days, as we work in many sensitive areas such as reproductive rights, harmful traditional practices, domestic violence, which not necessarily correspond to the priorities of some of the national agendas but which are, as you know, at the core of respect for

women's rights. And reproductive rights are even more relevant for indigenous women's rights.

In that sense, the UNFPA's efforts to contribute to the achievement of MDGs 1, 3, 5, and 6 have been constant, but unfortunately its results are still uneven. While maternal mortality rates have generally declined in most countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, it is sad to acknowledge that the inequalities of the region reflect higher rates of maternal mortality among indigenous women than among non-indigenous ones.

To give only an example that illustrates the gravity of the situation, in one country of the Latin America and Caribbean Region, maternal mortality rates have decreased from 219 (per 100,000 live births) in 1989 to 147 in 2004. However, among indigenous population, maternal mortality rate is 211 whereas among non-indigenous women, rate is 70. While women living in extreme poverty (and we know that most of indigenous women live in extreme poverty) have an average of eight children, women in the richest quintile have only 2.5 children.

Therefore, UNFPA would kindly request the members of the Forum to put emphasis on the reproductive rights issues and concerns in the different dialogues and to consider recommending special measures aimed at improving the reproductive health situation of thousands and thousands of indigenous women who deserve so.

Madame Chair,

One of the main lessons learned by UNFPA since long time ago has been the importance of including a participatory and socio-cultural approach to policies and programmes related to reproductive health; programmes that recognize and revitalize indigenous "knowledge and culture". UNFPA builds its approach respecting the traditions and most importantly working with the traditions, learning from your visions to ensure that one day human rights will be more than a concept, it will become a reality for all indigenous women in the world.

[16 May 2006, PM, Item 3, # 47, presented by Ms. Luz Angela Melo]

Thank You,