

13 September 2007

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,
on the Adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous
Peoples**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

I would like to congratulate you all for your work on this historic Declaration. In particular, I would like to commend the professionalism, H.E. Mr. Hilario G. Davide, Jr. the Permanent Representative of the Philippines, has demonstrated while facilitating the process leading up to this resolution.

Excellencies,

The General Assembly has come a long way on this issue. We first opened our doors to indigenous peoples at a ceremony to launch the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples in December 1992.

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

This partnership and cooperation demonstrates the General Assembly's continuing commitment to the world's indigenous peoples.

However, even with this progress indigenous peoples still 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; and, suffer from a lack of access to healthcare and education.

We should not however, cast indigenous peoples as victims, but rather as critical assets to the diversity of our global humanity.

Today, by adopting the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples we are making further progress to improve the situation of indigenous peoples around the world.

The General Assembly has also realized another important mandate that our Heads of State and Government agreed at the World Summit in 2005.

I am acutely aware that this Declaration is the product of over two decades of negotiations.

The importance of this document for indigenous peoples and, more broadly, for the human rights agenda, cannot be underestimated.

By adopting the Declaration, we are also taking another major step forward towards the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

We are also actively demonstrating the General Assembly's important role in the field of international standard-setting.

Thank you very much.