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**MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES
TO ENSURE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ARE INFORMED, PROTECTED AND PRIORITIZED
DURING THE GLOBAL COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Indigenous peoples live in both urban and rural locals and account today for over 476 million individuals spread across 90 countries in the world, accounting for 6.2% of the global population. Nonetheless, our communities are nearly 3 times as likely to be living in extreme poverty, and thus more prone to infectious diseases. Many indigenous communities are already suffering from malnutrition and immune-suppressive conditions, which can increase susceptibility to infectious diseases.

The extent of the devastating nature and potential of COVID-19 is uncertain. Member States must protect the most vulnerable in our global society. I urge you to take immediate steps to ensure that indigenous peoples are informed, protected and prioritized during the COVID-19 global health pandemic. In this respect, information in indigenous languages is important to ensure it is accessible and followed. Of special concern are the vulnerable chronically ill, those in medical fragility, as well as the indigenous elders. The indigenous elders are a priority for our communities as our keepers of history and traditions and cultures. We also ask Member States to ensure that indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation and initial contact exercise their right to self-determination and their decision to be isolated be respected. Further States must prevent outsiders from entering into their territories. Any plan or protective measures to address indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation and initial contact should be multidisciplinary and follow agreed protocols and international recommendations such as the recommendations of the Inter American Commission on Human Rights.

These are uncertain times, and the PFII members are exploring different options to advance their mandate of advising on indigenous issues. The Permanent Forum is committed and will work for the future to ensure that Indigenous peoples are engaged and included in public health-related interventions. We urge Member States and the international community to include the specific needs and priorities of indigenous peoples in addressing the global outbreak of COVID 19.

Indigenous peoples can contribute to seeking solutions. Their good practices of traditional healing and knowledge, such as sealing off communities to prevent the spread of diseases and of voluntary isolation, are being followed throughout the world today.