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**Statement by Mr. Álvaro Pop, President of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
with reference to the call made by Pope Francis to "Respect indigenous peoples".  
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From the time of conquest, indigenous peoples have had tragic encounters with representatives of the Catholic Church. As a result, our traditions and beliefs were threatened, our territories taken away, and our identity undermined with inhumane forms of oppression. However, indigenous peoples resisted, and we continue our struggle.

On August 9, the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples was celebrated. The first Latin American pope, Pope Francis, leader of the Catholic Church, wrote on his twitter account: *"We ask for respect for indigenous peoples whose very identity and existence are threatened."* A month before, in July along the same lines, he released a video titled: *"Respect for indigenous peoples"*<sup>1</sup>. In his visit to San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas in Mexico in February, the Pope presided over an outdoor mass in Spanish and in indigenous languages, uttering a plea of extreme importance: *"And yet, on many occasions, in a systematic and organized way, your people have been misunderstood and excluded from society. Some have considered your values, culture and traditions to be inferior. Others, intoxicated by power, money and market trends, have stolen your lands or contaminated them. How sad this is! How worthwhile it would be for each of us to examine our conscience and learn to say, 'forgive me!', 'forgive me, brothers and sisters!' Today's world, ravaged as it is by a throwaway culture, needs you!"*

In July 2015, when Pope Francis visited Ecuador, Bolivia and Paraguay, in his declarations and homilies, he talked about the situation of indigenous peoples, recognizing the first peoples of these lands, their cultures, identities, languages, and their relationship with Mother Earth. In Santa Cruz, Bolivia, Pope Francis in his message said: *"I humbly ask forgiveness, not only for the offense of the church itself, but also for crimes committed against the indigenous peoples during the so-called conquest of America."*

Pope Francis' messages calls on Member States to intensify efforts so that the identity and very existence of indigenous peoples does not continue to be threatened. It is essential that States implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by including it into their laws and policies. It is time to promote face to face, good faith, and equal but diverse dialogue between States and indigenous peoples to support each other and find solutions to the challenges facing humanity. Words are not enough.

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<sup>1</sup> El Video del Papa7 – Respeto de los pueblos indígenas – Julio 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_bJuKoLeBSA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_bJuKoLeBSA)