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Strengthening Partnership between Indigenous Peoples and States: treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements

Opening Remarks by Antti Korkeakivi, OHCHR

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I would like to start by extending a warm welcome to all indigenous participants, experts and UN mandate holders, including the Chairs of both the Permanent Forum and the Expert Mechanism. I would also to extend a warm welcome to State representatives, whose presence and engagements is essential for us to advance these issues and for this seminar to live up to its title

Strengthening Partnership between Indigenous Peoples and States: treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements

This seminar is another reflection of the importance that the High Commissioner for Human Rights attaches to indigenous peoples' rights and her commitment to the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

And when we work to advance the implementation of the Declaration, the improved implementation of treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements must be an integral part of our efforts, as is called for in the preamble as well as in Article 37 and other provisions of the Declaration. Indeed, for many indigenous representatives the improved implementation of treaty commitments was a major motivation in their tireless efforts to have the Declaration adopted. I believe that it is not only advisable but indeed an obligation for us to honor these efforts by doing our best to facilitate the implementation of the Declaration.

Today's seminar is not an isolated event but follows on a number of other activities that have been carried out by the UN. These include, as all of you know, the Study on treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements by late Miguel Alfonso Martínez and two seminars devoted to this topic, which produced a number of recommendations in this domain and in which many of you played a key role. My colleague Samia Slimane will soon recap these events in more detail.

At the same time, this is first such event taking place after the adoption of the Declaration so we now have a globally accepted context and framework in which to explore these issues.

And the framework is indeed global. This is something we have tried to reflect in the agenda of this seminar, which contains examples of treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements from different regions of the world, demonstrating that this is not an issue that is relevant in only a limited number of contexts.

We have selected eminent experts to introduce various examples, but the floor will be open for all of you to share your experiences. While we welcome critical perspectives -- and we all know that shortcomings in this domain are all too common -- I would also like to encourage you to share

constructive and positive examples for example of successful negotiation processes or of implementation plans or measures,

Indeed, in addition to aiming for a discussions with a global reach, we have also tried to make sure that the discussions will be inclusive – we have encouraged wide participation from both indigenous and government circles and it is heartening to see that so many of you are joining us today. While there will be no doubt different views and opinions on the issues to be discussed, it is only through constructive dialogue that we can advance these issues and build progress.

I now have the pleasure to give the floor to Joe Williams, who will be the Chairperson of the meeting. As many of you know, the 2nd treaty seminar recommended that a third seminar be organized in New Zealand – Aotearoa. Although Geneva was eventually chosen as the venue for financial reasons and in order to ensure broad participation, I trust that Hon. Justice Williams will, as former Chair of the Waitangi Tribunal, bring Waitangi spirit to the seminar and I look forward to having him guide as skillfully through the discussions today and tomorrow on these complicated but crucial issues.

I look forward to fruitful discussions.