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INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

Statement by the International Labour Organization to the 18th session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Item 9: Discussion on the theme “Traditional knowledge: Generation, transmission and protection”

**United Nations Headquarters, New York
Mr. Martin Oelz, ILO**

Chairperson, distinguished delegates,

The international community has agreed upon ambitious frameworks for tackling climate change and achieving sustainable development that recognizes the vital role of indigenous and tribal peoples. Their traditional knowledge, which cut across numerous aspects of sustainability and resilience, is recognized as a critical way forward in tackling environmental challenges.

New ILO research in collaboration with the University of Oxford has looked at the relevance of traditional knowledge in everyday practice and within the world of work. Our findings reflect that traditional knowledge and occupations concern multiple sectors and blend culture with economic and environmental sustainability. Some communities build on their knowledge systems and customary institutions to develop new forms of management of economic activity. Modern day labour-markets, innovation and an economy that is capable of addressing climate change needs these unique skills sets.

Traditional knowledge systems are also adapting to transformations in economies, societies, institutions and to modern technology. Some indigenous communities employ the latest technological advancements alongside their knowledge systems.

However, too many indigenous peoples continue to be among the poor, in particular indigenous women, with little access to formal training or the economy, and often face discrimination. Such a situation severely risks undermining opportunities for strengthening climate action or achieving sustainable development. It is hence critical to recognize and leverage indigenous peoples’ skills grounded in their knowledge systems – this can unleash innovation, create green jobs and enterprises, and strengthen climate action. This would also have many benefits for achieving gender equality, given that indigenous women are often the custodians of traditional knowledge.

Chairperson, distinguished delegates,

In conclusion, striving to better understand the role of indigenous and tribal peoples, their knowledge systems and their skills in a future of work that is increasingly confronting climate change is crucial.

Finally, we would like to invite all Forum participants for a book launch and discussion, tomorrow at lunch time in Conference Room 4 where we will showcase some of the emerging research undertaken in collaboration with the University of Oxford.