Distinguished Facilitators, fellow Panelists, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is both a privilege and a pleasure to address this workshop on Ethics of Leadership and Good Governance, organized by the International Indigenous Women’s Forum, MADRE and the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. I would like to thank the organizers for inviting the Division for Public Administration and Development Management to participate in this timely workshop, and additionally commend them for their initiative in promoting dialogue between indigenous communities, NGO’s and the United Nations towards the mainstreaming of indigenous concerns within the realm of good governance.

Given that one of the primary objectives of the Second International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People is to promote the full and effective participation of indigenous people in decisions which directly or indirectly affect their lifestyle, SPFII, in fulfilling this goal, has found a willing partner in DPADM. Our Division places participation in governance at the forefront of its work, and we consider citizen-government engagement as critical to the advancement of transparent, accountable and inclusive governance. We aim to strengthen indigenous participation in governance through a number of means, including -

1) Strengthening the dissemination of information and the promotion of knowledge of best practices in good governance
2) Developing the capacity of indigenous communities on the principles, strategies and methodologies of civic engagement through training workshops that will target representatives from indigenous communities, the government and civil society organizations.

This partnership that DPADM and SPFII have embarked upon falls clearly in line with resolution 59/174 of the United Nations General Assembly, which calls for greater “cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people - by means of action-oriented programs, specific projects, increased technical assistance and relevant standard-setting activities.”

Before going into the details of our partnership which aims to mainstream indigenous participation in governance, it is important to first to understand “good governance” and the role of the United Nations.

The World Bank defined good governance as the “exercise of political power to manage a nation’s affairs”1 and highlighted six aspects that are of particular importance:

1) Political accountability
2) Freedom of association and participation
3) Fair and reliable judicial system
4) Bureaucratic accountability
5) Freedom of information and expression
6) Effective and efficient public sector management.

While all these factors are important in moving towards the attainment of good governance, they may not be comprehensive when we consider the fact that minority groups, particularly the indigenous people, are still far away from having their fair share of socio-economic-political representation, even in a country that may score highly on all six categories. If we look at the second criteria which calls for the “freedom of association and participation”, such a freedom, and in particular, the capacity and means that enable one to access such freedoms, have by and large been deprived from the indigenous populace. In other words, when this definition is judged based on its direct impact on the Indigenous people, it falls short. In recent years, there has been

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an increasing emphasis to review the definition of good governance, with an increased emphasis on participation.

The Under-Secretary General of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Mr. Jose Antonio Ocampo, whom many of you are familiar with from the opening session of the forum, strongly emphasizes the need to promote participation in governance and recently stated that participatory governance not only provides citizens with access to information, but also to decision-making and power. It implies access for all, not only for a privileged few, including those most often excluded from the benefits of development, particularly the poor and minorities, the indigenous people. At the domestic level, it means expanding the very concept of governance, recognizing that the sphere of the public interest is a responsibility not only of government and the political process but also of civil society and the private sector. Thus, in essence, participation so defined is an essential political right.2

To this it must be added that for good governance to be participatory and reflective of the needs of minority communities, development practitioners must move away from a standard one-size-fits-all design of good governance, and retain some space for originality and creativity such as to fully incorporate all social settings, not only those of the predominant group.

DPADM and SPFII have become willing partners in the promotion of originality and creativity that is essential in incorporating indigenous groups in the realm of good governance that is truly participatory. In this regard, our first joint initiative has been to develop the capacity of Alternative Local Governments (ALG) in Ecuador, where the leadership structure of local municipalities is predominantly indigenous.

Indigenous leaders share strong cultural linkages with their constituents, including but not limited to, homogeneity in language, traditions, beliefs, and interests. Alternative Local Government’s - a significant shift from the traditional models of public administration - have as

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their core premise, the promotion of sustainable measures that are sensitive to the local culture, thereby creating a sense of popular ownership in the development process.

Municipalities adopting these measures have already experienced tangible societal transformations, including increased scope for poverty alleviation among the population at large - indigenous and non-indigenous. As a consequence, these initial gains have also triggered higher community expectations, requiring a more systematic approach to community need assessment, problem prioritization, resource mobilization, allocation, and program implementation and monitoring.

Consequently, there has developed an urgent need to strengthen and consolidate the efforts of Alternative Local Governments that often fall short of realizing their desired objectives due to (i) inadequate knowledge and absence of precise data of the groups they are attempting to provide services to; and (ii) lack of systematic approaches to need assessment, planning, budgeting and monitoring. In order to continue the good work accomplished initially and to adopt a more strategic and systematic approach to planning, budgeting and monitoring of development activities that incorporates successfully the community members (indigenous and non-indigenous) and improves linkages with institutions at the regional and national level, the indigenous local governments require capacity building in a number of areas.

In July 2005, SPFII and DPADM organized a consultative group meeting in Quito, Ecuador, that incorporated representatives from municipalities where indigenous leaders commanded positions of authority, and included mayors, council members, technocrats & NGO representatives. Based on the findings of the meeting, we have jointly developed a project that will develop the capacity of these municipalities in planning and budgeting. All the issues are identified by the actors themselves and tackled from a “human-centered” perspective – i.e. based on the importance attached to them by the people concerned. Currently, we are in the process of seeking the funding required to implement the project which will last for two years. It is our sincere hope and belief that such a project can be replicated not only in Latin America, but elsewwhere and wherever the indigenous populace has developed an organizational structure and
seeks a willing partner to develop its institutional capacity to mainstream its socio-political-economic concerns in the true spirit of good governance.

Indeed, with a long-term vision of increased cooperation with SPFII in mind towards the attainment of the goals of the Second Decade of the World’s Indigenous People, we have already developed an additional project proposal that aims to promote participatory governance in isolated indigenous communities where existent mechanisms for socio-economic-political participation by indigenous communities are either non-existent or in short supply. This project would target partnerships with local NGO’s precisely like Chirapaq serving one of the most isolated and under-developed provinces of Peru - Ayacucho, represented here by my distinguished colleague, Ms. Tarcila Rivera.

Indeed for our projects to be realized, we require, first and foremost, a demand for it in the first place by indigenous communities themselves and the civil society organizations, particularly NGOs who work closely with them. Indeed in designing and implementing our projects, we see ourselves as a willing and eager partner and never as a patron. The indigenous people themselves are in the best position to determine their needs, playing the pivotal role in project planning; the role of the United Nations and partner NGO’s would be to train indigenous leaders in the effective utilization of good governance tools; indigenous leaders and other community representatives are the ones who will be ultimately responsible for the final implementation of the project by utilizing the tools of participatory governance to their maximum effect.