Expert workshop on possible ways to enhance the

participation of Indigenous Peoples in the work of the

Human Rights Council

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Room XXVI, Palais des Nations, Geneva

Statement by Dr. Mariam WALLET ABOUBAKRINE, Co-facilitator

Representative Indigenous Peoples

Taghlassem, Good morning,

Distinguished Indigenous delegates,

Representatives of Member States,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank my Indigenous relations from the ICB for introducing the recommendation for this Workshop at the last session of the EMRIP and thanks also the Indigenous delegates, EMRIP, the HRC, and the Member States who worked with us to make this workshop happen and who have continued ongoing constructive discussions with Indigenous Peoples to ensure we are involved in leading this process.

Today, we are here to continue the work that began in 1923 when the great Haudenosaunee

(pronounced Ho-de-na-show-nay) leader, Deskaheh, traveled to Geneva to attend the League of Nations with the hope of achieving recognition of the sovereignty of the Iroquois

Confederacy. As many of you know, he was not allowed in.

He tried again in 1924 and was denied again. En 1925, the Maori leader Tahupōtiki Wiremu Rātana was also denied entry.

But we, Indigenous Peoples, continued - patiently and persistently - to demand a space in the international political arena where our voices could be heard. These efforts eventually led to the creation of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations; which then led to the creation of the UNPFII, which held its first meeting in May of 2002, almost 80 years after

Deskaheh’s first trip to Geneva. That is resilience.

In the following years, we achieved the creation of the Expert Mechanism for the Rights of

Indigenous Peoples, the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous

Peoples, and the adoption of the UNDRIP. These are significant achievements, but there is still so much more to do.

We, Indigenous Peoples, have contributed greatly to the United Nations. Our participation has enhanced the work of this institution. Whether the member states realize it or not, we are their greatest allies. They cannot solve the environmental, social, economic, and spiritual crises that the world is currently facing without engaging us as partners.

We are now approaching the 100th anniversary of Deskahe’s first trip to Geneva, yet we are still facing the same challenges. In nearly every country on Mother Earth, Indigenous Peoples still lag behind the general population in all development indicators; we still have less access to healthcare and education; we still do not have secure rights to our lands, territories, and resources; and we still suffer grave abuses of our human rights for defending our territories, or simply speaking up on behalf of our communities.

Despite these injustices we, Indigenous Peoples, continue to contribute to the well-being of all – in terms of global health; global food security; protection of the Earth’s

biodiversity; maintaining the health of all of its ecosystems: rainforests, the arctic, deserts,

etc. Indigenous knowledge - Indigenous ways of living - have a key role to play in finding responses to the challenges presented by global climate change; in creating global food security; in creating truly sustainable development models and in building sustainable economies, and peaceful societies. We are doing our part.

Now, we expect UN Member States to do theirs. Enhanced participation of Indigenous Peoples representative institutions in the UN system must be achieved; the rights of Indigenous Peoples affirmed in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and as enshrined in the UNDRIP must be implemented.

So let us work together these next four days to advance this process. Let us put our minds and our hearts in a good place and make real, significant advances towards allowing Indigenous Peoples to assume our rightful role as partners in the UN system. We are here to participate, to contribute.

We cannot wait another 100 years.

Tanemert-Thank you.