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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 17, 2009

Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission hosts 4th Annual North American Indigenous Caucus

St. Michaels, Ariz. – The Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission (NNHRC), in collaboration with the Office of the Speaker, hosted the 4th Annual North America Regional Indigenous Peoples Caucus Preparatory Session for the 8th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues Friday and Saturday in Window Rock, Ariz.

Over 700 North American federally recognized tribal and indigenous leaders were invited to participate in discussions relating to economic and social development, culture, environmental issues, education and human rights and to plan for the implementation of the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Miss Navajo Nation 2008-2009 Yolanda Charley gave the invocation and Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly gave the opening address, welcoming an assembly of over 70 people.

“We’re indigenous people, we’re all equal and should all be treated equal,” Vice President Shelly said. “We all have the same goals here and need to keep focus on unity.”

Discussion of putting together a committee to focus on the implementation of the UN Declaration who would report to the Permanent Forum and the need for broader participation were listed high priorities.

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Secwepemc Representative Arthur Manuel of Canada stressed that a committee is needed who will put pressure on the U.S.

“We’ve got to realize being from North America, we come from the countries that didn’t approve the declaration. They don’t want to recognize us,” Manuel said. “It’s important to be very careful. We have to make sure not to be over-manipulated by the whole process.”

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the UN in 2007 with 144 countries voting in favor of it and four countries voting against it, which were Canada, New Zealand, Australia and the United States.

The group expressed hope in President Barack Obama’s administration, conveying interests in presenting him with the statements in the declaration with hopes of gaining recognition.

“We need to be reasonable and persistent and put something out there of substance, we’ll ask for the moon later,” said International Treaty Council Executive Director Andrea Carmen.

The UN Permanent Forum is set to meet in New York City in mid-May. For more information about the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Rights visit the UN website at www.un.org.

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