Bangkok, 5 October 2009 (Eleonor Baldo-Soriano) — Just as they did in the Bonn Climate Talks in August, indigenous peoples, long unrecognized as “guardians of mother earth,” are making their voices heard as state negotiators gather here in Bangkok for the 2nd week of negotiations that would facilitate an agreement in Copenhagen in December 2009.

Affirming their roles as global actors, almost 200 indigenous peoples that make up the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC), gathered in Bangkok to ensure the inclusion of indigenous peoples’ rights in the climate change talks. This is a significant delegation that establishes the global unity and solidarity of indigenous peoples to ensure that their perspectives and proposals are not only surfaced, but more importantly, included in the outcomes of the ongoing talks beyond 2012.

The IIPFCC is a global network of indigenous peoples from Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Pacific and Arctic and North America engaging with the UNFCC processes. It has been meeting daily to discuss the state of negotiations and the response of indigenous peoples. It actively conducts dialogues and consultations with different government delegations, UNFCCC bodies, UN agencies and NGOs and welcomes such meetings with other groups and institutions.

On September 26 to 27, the IIPFCC formulated a policy document that summarizes their issues and concerns in relation to climate change. It emphasizes the role of indigenous peoples - not only as stakeholders in climate change mitigation and adaptation processes and actions, but as rights holders - with contributions in solving the climate change crisis. The demands of indigenous peoples, as contained in its policy document, were also expressed in a statement read on the 02 October plenary of the Ad-Hoc Working Group on Long Term Cooperative Actions (AWG-LCA).

In this document, indigenous peoples stipulate three principles:

The first principle is to recognize and respect the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, in particular their rights to lands, territories and all resources, in accordance with the United Nations
Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). In the Anchorage Declaration of the Indigenous Peoples’ Global Summit held in April 2009, indigenous peoples reiterated that the “rights of indigenous peoples, affirmed by the UNDRIP, must be fully respected in all decision-making processes and activities related to climate change.

Second, parties should ensure the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples, in accordance with the right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). Any policy, programme or project, including those on climate change, which will be implemented on indigenous territories, should be carried out with indigenous peoples’ FPIC. FPIC and the right to self determination are the minimum standards to safeguard the rights and interests of indigenous peoples through any project life cycle, including policy framing, planning and design, implementation, restoration, rehabilitation, benefit sharing and conflict resolution.

And third is that parties should recognize the fundamental role and contribution of indigenous peoples’ traditional knowledge, innovations and practices. Indigenous peoples have intrinsic contributions towards addressing the climate crisis because of their ecologically sustainable, low carbon way of life and traditional knowledge, innovations and adaptation practices. Sustainable and culturally diverse methods have allowed indigenous peoples to manage, nurture, and maintain ecosystems for generations. Their customary resource management systems have proven to be ecologically sustainable, low carbon economies. Traditional knowledge, innovations and adaptation practices embody local adaptive management to the changing environment, and complement scientific research, observations and monitoring.

The policy document recognizes that historic and profound transformations are needed to find lasting solutions to climate change. And the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples, including indigenous women and children, is key to achieving a just and equitable outcome of the climate negotiations.