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Statement submitted by Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2011/100.

Statement*

The Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights, the Cornell International Human Rights Clinic and La Asociación para la Investigación y la Acción Social NOMADESC have consistently worked together on initiatives towards the fulfilment of the right to education of minorities in the Americas. These initiatives have spanned four years and included travel to three different countries and consultation with hundreds of individuals, resulting in numerous actions. Some accomplishments include the presentation of a report to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The report informed expert recommendations at the United Nations Forum on Minorities and the Right to Education. In addition, we submitted an amicus curiae brief before the Constitutional Court of Colombia, which found that the Government must immediately cease charging tuition for primary education.

Most recently, the RFK Center and the Cornell Clinic sent a delegation to Cali, Colombia, from 6 to 11 April 2011 to assess the educational situation of indigenous Nasa people living within the Honduras and Cerro Tijeras indigenous reservations. The delegation interviewed dozens of people, including school officials, students, parents, teachers, indigenous leaders, organizational partners and professors at private and public universities. Although this submission focuses primarily on Colombia, it is emblematic of issues faced across numerous minority groups throughout many countries in the Americas.

The 2000 Millennium Summit established that by 2015 all children should complete a full course of primary schooling. Treaties ratified by Colombia, along with national legislation, affirm the obligation that primary education must be free and compulsory. The following are some of the most severe challenges that Colombia faces in achieving these goals with respect to indigenous communities:

- Distance of primary schools: children may walk more than two hours each way to reach primary school. As a result, children do not attend or often miss school, particularly during the rainy season, and face personal security concerns on their long journey to school.
- Costs of primary schools: tuition, uniforms, school supplies and meals in primary schools can cost a family a significant portion of their income. Consequently, many children do not attend or drop out of primary education, particularly girls.

United Nations Member States, including Colombia, must dedicate greater resources to ensuring that its most vulnerable populations equally achieve full primary enrolment and completion without discrimination. In order to achieve the education goal of the Millennium Development Goals and align Colombia's and other similarly situated countries' educational systems with their national and international obligations, Governments should:

- Make primary education free: stop charging tuition for public school and ancillary costs, which, in Colombia, is mandated by its own Constitutional Court.

* The present statement is being issued without formal editing.

- Provide transportation and build roads: additional resources should be allocated to build more schools and roads to make schools easier to reach and provide public or subsidized transportation to school.

We recommend that the ministerial declaration take into account the special challenges faced by minority populations across the Americas, particularly those living in rural areas, in accessing quality and culturally sensitive education, including ethno-education and indigenous language classes, and propose specific solutions, including those outlined here.
