Madam Chair, distinguished members of the UNPFII, distinguished participants,

I would like to speak about the point concerning “Ways to enhance the participation of indigenous peoples at the United Nations”.

At its Sixth World Conservation Congress, celebrated in September 2016 in Hawai`i, the Members of IUCN adopted 13 Resolutions on indigenous peoples on a number of issues. Particularly important was the adoption of a Resolution creating a new category of IUCN Members specifically for indigenous peoples’ organizations. This is a historic development for IUCN, and also for the conservation movement, and a potentially useful example for the United Nations.

Since its inception, IUCN has had two categories of voting Members: Members from governments and Members from civil society. Indigenous peoples' organizations were included in this second category, generally referred to as "non-governmental organizations". For a long time indigenous organizations expressed their discomfort with this structure, as it did not recognize their identity and character, which differentiate them fundamentally from other entities of civil society.

After a long process, IUCN Members decided to modify the institution's statutes to create a new category of Members called "Indigenous Peoples' Organizations", which comprises organizations which identify themselves as such and recognizes their particular characteristics. I would like to emphasize that this is the first time IUCN has reformed its membership structure, and has done so specifically to meet the demands of indigenous peoples' organizations. With this change, IUCN hopes to integrate many more indigenous organizations as Members, which will increase their influence on the programme and the life of the institution.

This process of creating the new category of IUCN Members was long and complex, and still requires operational measures to deliver the expected results. We are already working on this together with our indigenous Members.
It is important to highlight that at the same time other conservation organizations that are also Members of IUCN have taken similar steps, incorporating indigenous organizations, representatives and experts at various institutional levels.

Madam Chair,

Conservation organizations have gone through a long but important process to give more space to indigenous peoples within their actions and structures; but much remains to be done. In 1996, 21 years ago, the first policy statement of a conservation organization on the rights of indigenous peoples was adopted. This policy was based on the draft text of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that existed at that time. Since then, many changes have taken place in the sense of increasing the effective participation of indigenous peoples in conservation actions, with full respect for their rights. I personally have had the privilege of being directly associated with many steps that have been taken in this process.

The implementation of these policies and measures still requires significant efforts, in particular to ensure that Governments, who have in their hands the conservation decisions, fully implement the provisions of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We hope to increase our joint work with indigenous peoples to this end, this time counting on indigenous organizations that are IUCN Members and who today feel empowered and strengthened through their new category to determine the direction of the work and the role of IUCN for the effective implementation of a new paradigm of conservation worldwide.

Thank you very much Madame Chair.