Position Paper

There are approximately 370 million indigenous peoples that reside in over 70 countries worldwide. They are one of the worlds most marginalized and outcast peoples, and more often than not, experience isolation from many essential government services.1 A primary example of this isolation is the disparity of indigenous people’s access to healthcare. Around the world, indigenous people’s access to healthcare services are not equal to, and often considerably lower than, healthcare the available for a nation’s nonindigenous population.2 Indigenous people experience an overall poorer quality of life, are more likely to have disabilities, suffer from long-term health problems, and they are ultimately more likely to die younger than their non-indigenous counterparts. Extreme poverty is a common trait of indigenous communities worldwide.

This poverty is rooted in systemic factors such as lack of access to education and social services, destruction of indigenous economic systems and socio-political structures, forced displacement, armed conflict, and the degradation of their traditional lands.3 These factors, all remnants of colonization, are exacerbated by structural racism and discrimination, and make the young, old, and expecting mothers in indigenous communities especially vulnerable to poor health. The result of these external factors on native communities, are that indigenous people experience disproportionately high levels of maternal and infant mortality, malnutrition, cardiovascular illness, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria.4 Indigenous women can be especially vulnerable targets for these severe health problems, as they are often made victims during armed conflicts and natural disasters, and are often denied access to education, property, and economic resources in much higher occurrences than the men of their community. However, women play a very important role in indigenous communities, as the primary caretaker of their family’s health and wellness. This creates a systemic disparity and lack of understanding for proper preventative measures and treatments for common diseases and infections that are traditionally passed along generation to generation. Perhaps even more troubling, incidences of public health issues such as addiction, alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, and suicide continue to increase in indigenous 1 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. "Indigenous People’s Access to Health Services." The State of the World’s Indigenous People, 2016, 2-9. 2 Health and Nutrition, UNICEF TARCO. "Maternal, Neonatal, Child Health (MNCH): Health disparities in LAC." UNICEF TARCO. Last modified July 21, 2011. 3 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. "The State of the World's Indigenous People."

The State of the World's Indigenous People, 2009, 155-183. 4 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The State of the World's Indigenous People, 2009, 155- 183. United Nations General Assembly: Special Session on Indigenous Affairs SECONDARY SCHOOLS’ UNITED NATIONS SYMPOSIUM 2016 | PAGE 4 communities worldwide, with many regions declaring a state of emergency for the number of suicide attempts seen in individual native communities and towns.5 The goal behind this topic is to encourage member states to expand the outreach of national health systems to provide holistic health and education programs geared specifically for a nation’s indigenous population.6 These programs should address, among other primary issues, immediate support for communities destroyed by mental illness and suicide, and provisions of basic medical supplies and medications for the treatable diseases and infections wracking the area. It would also be favorable to incorporate indigenous healers and cultural perspectives on health and illness in any policies, guidelines or programs that may be implemented.7 These issues need to be addressed while keeping in mind the tenuous relationship and lack of trust many member states have with their indigenous population, government finances, available NGOs, the urgency of immediate action, and the differing opinions of member states.