MISSION OF PAUL HUNT, THE UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHT TO THE HIGHEST ATTAINABLE STANDARD OF HEALTH

ORAL REMARKS TO THE PRESS, MONDAY 14 MAY 2007, QUITO, ECUADOR

Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great privilege for me to be here.

I would like to warmly thank the Government of Ecuador for inviting me.

I would also like to warmly thank UNDP for organising a rich and challenging schedule of meetings.

You will find in the room a short document, in Spanish, that explains my UN responsibilities as Special Rapporteur on the right to health. It also provides some additional background information.

In brief, I am an independent expert who reports to, and advises, the UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly. I am a citizen of New Zealand.

Please note that I am independent. I am not a member of the UN secretariat. I am not a member of the secretariat of the Pan American Health Organisation. As an independent expert, I exercise my professional judgement, without fear or favour, and report to the United Nations.

Today, I confine myself to seven short points.

First, my UN mandate is to look at the human right to health. During this mission, I will focus on the aerial spraying of glyphosate along the Ecuador-Colombia border. Crucially, I will look at this issue through the prism of the right to health. In the room you will find a note explaining more about the mission.

Second, this is not a scientific mission. My colleagues and I will not be taking samples or doing laboratory tests. Of course, we are reviewing the existing scientific evidence. We will listen to personal testimonies in the north. And we will critically examine all the material through the lens of the human right to health. Then I will reach conclusions and make recommendations. Others have already done scientific studies – and several more are in preparation. I am not here to add to this on-going scientific work.

Third, during the mission I will meet with Ministers, senior public officials, experts, the Ombudsman's Office, international organisations, Ecuador's development partners, civil society, and many more. On Wednesday and Thursday I will visit the northern border region.

Fourth, while the focus of my mission is the aerial spraying of glyphosate, on Tuesday I will be meeting with civil society organisations to hear from them about what they see as the most important *general* right to health issues in Ecuador. After the mission,

I will be writing to the Government about these general right to health issues. I will make this correspondence public. These general right to health issues will not be analysed in my formal UN mission report.

Fifth, on Friday 18th May, at 4.30pm, I will hold a press conference and convey my preliminary conclusions and recommendations. After today's press conference and until Friday afternoon, I will not give media comment or interviews.

Sixth, after the mission I will write a formal mission report, with conclusions and recommendations, and submit it to the UN Human Rights Council.

My final point is this.

Last month I wrote to the Government of Colombia asking if I might visit Bogota to discuss my mission with them. Last week, just before departing for Ecuador, the Colombian Government told me that it would not be possible for me to visit Bogota at this time.

This greatly disappoints me.

Clearly, we cannot make progress on this important issue without respectful and open dialogue and cooperation among all parties.

I commend both Governments for the attempts that they have made to address this issue in a cooperative manner, but very much regret that the Government of Colombia does not appear to have recognised the constructive spirit in which I am endeavouring to fulfil the duties entrusted to me by the United Nations.

Professor Paul Hunt
14 May 2007