

Madam Chairperson, your Excellencies and Diplomats, Indigenous representatives and members of the forum.

My Name is Deb Pangerl and I have been working with The IMAGE Project from Minnesota, USA - and I'm here to speak on behalf of the Maasai Community of Tanzania.

First, you need to know that I have the deepest respect for the Tanzanian government, including the Commissioner for Human Rights And Good Governance (CHRAGG).

For 19 years I've been working to support the education of Maasai girls in the Southern Highlands and Eastern part of Tanzania.

I've witnessed traditions of the Maasai community...

- Some so honorable, I want to be part of them
- Others that need immediate attention to protect indigenous girls and women

In 2007, I started asking the girls if they'd like to share more about their lives.

- One brave girl told me, "Madam, what would you do when your friend is stripped naked, tied to a tree and beaten because she will not agree to be forced into marriage?"
- Since then, I have collected their stories in my heart and on paper.

The truth is Indigenous Maasai girls are forced into early marriages and sold in exchange for cows.

- They have no voice and no rights.
- The oppression is so deep that the girls and women do not even know they have human rights.

If any of you here today had to look these girls in the eyes, what would you say to give them hope?

I personally know of more than 100 girls who had sponsorships and disappeared from schools in Tanzania – I believe they were forced into early marriages and sold in exchange for cows.

- I have their photos and letters. I know their names.
- They did exist as human beings and now they are gone – taken into a life that they didn't choose for themselves.

I mean no disrespect, Madam Chair, but where are the UN agencies who have programs to help these children?

One day I met with a mother who hung her head below the table in shame (and I had to hang my head under the table to hear her) begging me to take her daughter to school so she had a chance for a better life.

I know of FGM, rapes and girls who are kidnapped at the river when they are most vulnerable.

I've met mothers who sleep in the dirt and in trees with no voice and no access to own properties.

- And I've heard of a mother's plea when their project was ending, "Please don't leave us swimming at the bottom of the ocean while the world moves on."

It is 2019 and it's painful for me to know what these girls and women go through - --and despite the fact that there are UN agencies and others on the ground in Dar es salaam – these children are not being helped.

Yet, I try to look for solutions:

- There is a small school in Tanzania, called Namnyaki Secondary School, that provides education for Maasai girls. The school is sustained and run by the Maasai community

- Teaching girls they have a voice and that they have a place in this world

There is progress, but cultural change is needed and the United Nations can start that movement!

I would like to use this opportunity to call for scholarship support from International agencies so that these girls have access to education and justice that is long over-due for them.

TODAY - This is your chance to

show truth in your motto – no one will be left behind – including the girls in this small school.

Education allows these girls to:

- Become teachers, social workers, nurses.
- They work, they give back and contribute to making the world a better place.

Think about the potential if you empower this change!

Today, these girls are waiting to hear how the United Nations stands on these human rights issues

I believe they deserve an answer from you

But, the question is: **How will the responsible United Nations agencies respond to them?**

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Indigenous Maasai women and girls, Edward Tunyon and all leaders who have contributed to this statement.

Thank you, Madam Chair for your attention.