

The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Second Session, New York, 12-23 May 2003
Agenda item 4c , Health

doCip
ARCHIV

Joint Intervention by the International Indian Treaty Council, Indigenous Environmental Network, Seventh Generation Fund, Yoemem Tekia Foundation, Indigenous Youth Caucus, Asemblea Nacional Indigena Plural por la Autonomia (Mexico), American Indian Law Alliance, Na Koa Ikaiko o Ka Lathui Hawai'i, Native Children's Survival, Teton Lakota Nation Treaty Council, Hawai'i Institute for Human Rights, FENOCIN-Ecuador, Indigenous Peoples' and Nations Coalition - Alaska, Pit River Indian Nation, Alaska Community Action on Toxics, Indigenous World Association, Assembly of First Nations (Canada), Instituto Tonanzin, Frente Indigena Oaxaqueno, Mujeres Mayas de Jovel Maya'ik de Chiapas Mexico, First Peoples Worldwide, Fundacion para la Promocion de Conocimiento Indigena, American Indian Treaty Council Information Center, Asociacion Nabguana (Pamana), Coordinadora Nacional de Pequeños y Medianos Productores de Guatemala, Association of Limba Shaman (Nepal) and Kulung Rai Language and Cultural Development Community (Nepal).

Thank you Mr. Chairman and respectful greetings to all.

We respectfully call the attention of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues to the devastating impacts of environmental contamination and eco-system destruction on the health, well being and traditional subsistence practices of Indigenous Peoples, and in particular on the health and development of Indigenous infants, children and future generations.

Persistent organic pollutants (POPs) currently the subject of an internationally binding treaty which is yet to be implemented, include many pesticides as well as industrial chemicals and by products such as PCB's and dioxins. Their proven adverse effects on children, in particular developing fetuses and nursing infants, include many types of birth defects, diabetes, hormonal and reproductive disorders, learning disabilities and neurological damage, cancers and immune system disorders.

Despite these devastating known health effects, industrial countries such as the US continue to allow the export of toxic chemicals, including ones which have been banned for use in their own countries, to developing countries, such as Mexico and Guatemala. It is estimated that between 1996 and 2000, the United States exported nearly 1.1 billion pounds of pesticides that were identified as known or suspected carcinogens, mainly to developing countries to be used for agriculture

The results of such practices have been well documented in Indigenous agricultural communities such as the Yaqui Pueblos of Sonora Mexico, including high levels of multiple pesticides in breast milk and the cord blood of new born infants, and serious developmental problems in young children in high pesticide use areas.

Mercury contamination of subsistence foods by mining, coal-fired power plants and

other industrial sources, also affects the developing brain, kidneys and nervous system of the unborn child. Indigenous children from communities depending on fishing are among the most affected. Mercury from abandoned gold mines continues to affect Indigenous Peoples in areas such as Northern California, USA. UNEP estimates that more than one million people, including many women and children, in Latin American are still involved in small scale mining activities in which mercury is used.

These examples reflect only the "tip of the iceberg", in which our children and unborn generations are being robbed of their health and development potential by industrial activities and toxic contamination. We therefore call upon the Permanent Forum Second Session to submit through ECOSOC the following recommendations to begin to address these critical concerns:

- 1) That the Inter-Agency Support Group (IASG) facilitate and coordinate WHO, UNICEF, UN Environmental Programme (UNEP), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and other appropriate UN agencies, to host a global seminar on Indigenous Peoples and environmental health to enable Indigenous Peoples, UN agencies, experts, and Indigenous traditional knowledge holders to identify critical concerns, prioritize issues and develop strategies towards addressing environmental health concerns affecting Indigenous Peoples and particularly Indigenous children and women.
- 2) That nation-state meetings be held in states where Indigenous peoples live prior to this seminar, with the full participation of Indigenous peoples, for fact finding, assessing current conditions and evaluating state-level initiatives concerning the protection of the environmental health of Indigenous peoples.
- 3) That all states be encouraged to ratify the Stockholm Convention on POPs, and that the Conference of Parties (COP) to the Stockholm Convention implement mechanisms for Indigenous peoples to maintain an active formal presence in the COPs as well as in the Global Monitoring Programme's evaluation process of the Stockholm Convention.
- 4) That support be expressed for the work of the UN Commission on Human Rights Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, Toxic Wastes and Dangerous Products Fatma Zora Ouhachi-Vesely in her efforts to address the ongoing health impacts of the stockpiling and exporting of banned toxics, especially pesticides, and call upon the international community to prohibit this continued practice by states.
- 5) That UNEP take immediate action on mercury contamination, including the initiation of a global legally-binding instrument for elimination, and other measures at the next UNEP Governing Council meeting of the Environmental Ministers in South Korea in 2005, with the structured, formal and full participation of Indigenous Peoples in all related discussions.
- 6) That the UN Human Rights Committee examine reports submitted by state parties to the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights regarding their full compliance with article one, which states in part that "in no case may a people be deprived of its own means of

subsistence", in particular regarding the effects of environmental contamination, imposed development and loss of habitat on the subsistence resources and practices of Indigenous Peoples and related health impacts

7) That the Committee on the Rights of the Child as the Treaty monitoring body for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, examine state parties' compliance with article 24, recognizing the basic right of all children to "the provision of adequate and nutritional foods and clean drinking water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution", paying particular attention to the impacts of pollutants on the traditional subsistence foods, lands, waters and health of Indigenous children; and that the Special Session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child focussing on Indigenous children in September of this year also address this critical issue.

Thank you, for all our relations.