

05.11.2004

Item 3

#19



Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
3rd Session, 10-21 May 2004, New York
Agenda Item 4: Substantive Theme: Indigenous Women
11 May 2004

Report of the 2nd Asian Indigenous Women's Conference

Victoria Tauli Corpuz
Convenor, Asian Indigenous Women's Network
Executive Director, Tebtebba, Philippines

Thank you Mr. Chairperson for allowing us to present our report on the Second Asian Indigenous Women's Network which was held in Baguio City, Philippines from March 4-8, 2004. At the outset, I would like to draw your attention to the Document No.E/C.19/2004/CRP.1 entitled *Baguio Declaration of the 2nd Asian Indigenous Women's Conference* which is one of the documents released for this session. This is one of the key outcomes of the Conference and it contains a summary of the issues presented and the recommendations for action addressed to ourselves and others. Indigenous women from 13 countries in Asia participated.

This conference was held ten years after we held the first one in 1993 where the Asian Indigenous Women's Network (AIWN) was born. At the Beijing World Conference on Women which was held in 1995, the AIWN organized the Indigenous Women's Tent which provided a space for indigenous women to meet and plan. Out of this process we came out with the *Beijing Indigenous Women's Declaration*¹ which has served as a basic framework of reference and education material for indigenous women in various parts of the world.

I will highlight and elaborate some of the key proposals from our conference. But before I do that I would just like to bring your attention the urgent issues shared which must be addressed by governments and the international community. First, the worsening physical and sexual violence against indigenous women committed by military and paramilitary forces which increased tremendously after the September 11. The war on terror and the passage of national policies or laws are restricting the exercise of democratic rights and freedoms of the indigenous women and communities. If we say participation of women is key to their empowerment, many of these laws and policies are now curtailing this.

Second, is the continuing development aggression, meaning the entry of so-called development projects, brought in by corporations and the government, even against our consent. Most of the problems cited in yesterday's panel and interventions echo what emerged out of the conference. In this light I am forwarding some concrete actions which we ourselves will undertake but which we are also addressing to the Permanent Forum and the UN bodies, agencies and funds.

¹ Please go to www.tebtebba.org to see a copy of this Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women. Email address to contact us: vco@skyinet.net, aiwn@skyinet.net.

1. **Justice and redress for indigenous women who are victims of physical and sexual violence and of illegal sex trafficking.** We are alarmed by the countless stories of indigenous women in the region who have been killed and those raped by military and paramilitary forces, in countries like Bangladesh, Philippines, India, Myanmar, Nepal, among others, who up to now are scared to even come out and tell their stories because of serious threats by the perpetrators who are still scot-free. Since 9/11 many governments have launched series of military operations under the guise of containing terrorism and controlling drug trafficking. Some indigenous women's organizations are not even allowed to exist anymore. We are also equally concerned with the increasing number of indigenous women who became victims of illegal sex trafficking.

Mr. Chairperson and members of the Permanent Forum, we urge you to support us in using UN mechanisms and processes which can help start the processes whereby these women can be given justice and redress for these crimes and violations of their rights.

- We demand justice and accountability for criminal offenses perpetrated against indigenous women and there should be indemnification for the victims of political repression and sexual violence.
- We call on governments who enacted repressive and undemocratic anti-terrorism bills to repeal these.
- We would like to invite the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking of Women to visit the countries where these incidents took place and where trafficking of indigenous women is a serious problem. We ask the secretariat of the Permanent Forum and the UN-WGIP to help us in this endeavour..
- We will compile the documentation on this, monitor developments on this and present this as a report to the Beijing plus 10 processes, the next session of the Permanent Forum and the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations this July.
- We will develop relevant and appropriate education and training materials for indigenous women which will be translated in some of the local languages of Asian indigenous women and undertake training activities to develop many more women leaders and activists. In particular we would like to train them on how to use the various international instruments and UN complaint mechanisms, treaty bodies, Special Rapporteurs, etc. to bring their issues and complaints and hopefully they will be able to get redress and justice. We will continue to strengthen indigenous women's organizations at the local level. We are asking the support of UNIFEM and other donors to support these initiatives. For us to be able to do all these, including your recommendations, Mr. Chairman, yesterday, we need to have resource centers which are adequately funded and staffed.

2. **Free, prior and informed consent and other measures which should be taken to address development aggression.** We strongly support the evolution of standards, policies and guidelines on free, prior, and informed consent which ensures indigenous women's full and effective participation. FPIC is underpinned by right of indigenous peoples to self-determination, human rights and the rights-based approach to development which are championed by the UN. It is an imperative, therefore, that the processes furthering the elaboration of this right and principle should be hastened at the national and international level.

At the conference many of the reports were of indigenous women and their communities which have been displaced and who are now suffering from adverse ecological and social impacts of so-called development projects. The most notorious among these are extractive industries (oil, gas and mineral), large hydro-electric dams, palm oil plantations, pulp and paper industries, and monocrop agricultural plantations, national parks and protected areas, and increasingly biopiracy of indigenous peoples' biogenetic resources and traditional knowledge. Large dams are still being built in spite of the serious impacts of these on the lives, livelihoods, cultures and spiritual existence of indigenous women. In the Philippines, almost all the large dams are built or proposed in indigenous peoples' lands. In India 40-50% of those displaced by development projects are tribal peoples who account for 8% of the nation's 1 billion people. It is a folly to even talk about achieving the Millennium Development Goals if the forced displacement of indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands continues as it is in Asia.

- We insist that FPIC should be obtained before any of these come into our communities and there should be a review of controversial projects and programs to assess their social and ecological impacts and whether indigenous peoples FPIC were obtained beforehand.
 - We urge that all governments, the UN, international financial institutions, should study and implement the recommendations of the World Commission on Dams which recognized FPIC.
 - We urge the Executive Directors of the World Bank to adopt the recommendations of Dr. Emil Salim in his Report of the Extractive Industries Review that right to FPIC of indigenous peoples be recognized.
 - We will continue to strengthen our campaigns against development aggression and militarization and for the defense of our lands, resources and cultures from destruction and assimilation.
 - We demand the proper rehabilitation and compensation for our lands, waters and forests, destroyed by destructive development projects.
 - We demand a just share of the benefits taken from our lands, waters and territories which also include the environmental services we have provided for the rest of the world.
3. **Creation of an Indigenous Peoples' International Commission for Conflict Resolution and Mediation.** We strongly support the recommendation from the International Conference on Conflict Resolution, Sustainable Development and Indigenous Peoples which was organized by Tebtebba in Manila, Philippines in

2000, for the creation of this body. In particular, we support the specific recommendations from this conference which addressed how indigenous women can be involved more meaningfully in bringing about peace. We are strongly supporting the efforts of Tebtebba to organize this commission and make it functional. This will submit regular reports to the Permanent Forum and other relevant UN bodies.

We do not see ourselves as simply victims, we are survivors of our struggles against violence and militarization. We are active players in peace-making and conflict resolution efforts in our communities and we will continue to engender indigenous conflict resolution and peace-building processes and ensure the full and effective participation of indigenous women in peace processes and accords entered into by our people and communities. In particular, we would like to ensure that indigenous women become part of peace negotiating panels to ensure that their issues are taken on board by conflicting parties. However, we would like the donors and non-government organizations, and conflicting parties (both governments and armed groups) to support this effort.

4. **We commit ourselves to renew and revitalize our traditional cultures, customary laws, social values and practices.** We accept the challenge and responsibility to address cultural renewal and revitalization to promote gender-sensitive values and structures within our communities. We note with concern that some modern changes in our traditional social, cultural and political institutions and practices have led to a loss of values and codes of behaviour which uphold gender-sensitive structures and roles, while accepting our responsibility to change other customary laws and practices which oppress indigenous women.

- We will speak up against abusive treatment of indigenous women in the name of custom and tradition.
- We will revitalise traditional support systems against domestic violence and work towards removing prejudice and negative perceptions of indigenous peoples and women which undermine our pride and self-confidence.
- We will strive towards working with our traditional leaders and institutions to ensure that women are not disinherited from family properties, nor used to propagate social status through bride-price or dowry.

Finally, we call on the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to urge and monitor how the various UN agencies and bodies are supporting the recommendations which emerged out of the various conferences and processes of indigenous women's organizations and networks. We have come a long way from where we were ten years ago. We still have a long journey to travel. We strongly believe that it is not our just our vulnerability which is the issue here. It is more the valuable contributions we can give to the world, in terms of values and norms, knowledge, spirituality and cultural diversity. These should be treasured and appropriately transferred to the future generations because it is not just us who will benefit but the whole of humanity.