

**UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Tenth Session  
May 16-27, 2011  
Global Indigenous Women's Caucus Statement**

**Agenda Item 6.7  
Half-day discussion on the Right to Water**

Honorable Madame Chairperson, Members of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, distinguished representatives of Indigenous Peoples, sisters and brothers here today,

At the initiation of this 10<sup>th</sup> session of the UNPFII, as a ceremonial act of global importance in the realization of our shared Humanity, the Xicalli Cemanahuac (gourds of authority) of the Indigenous Women of Mother Earth were presented to Chairperson Mirna Cunningham as an act of affirmation, self determination, responsibility and spiritual commitment from the guardians of the watersheds of the planet.

All Indigenous peoples believe that water is sacred. Water is a living entity for all peoples, and has a sacred use and function. By virtue of our spiritual and reciprocal relationship to water, as Indigenous women we fulfill many of our responsibilities and obligations toward Mother Earth. In our practices and ceremonies we give birth to and make water grow. Through our relationship with water, Indigenous women play a key role in sustaining life and its biological and cultural diversity, and in the survival and well-being of our communities. Current economic and environmental phenomena, such as neoliberal policies that promote market-based and invasive development projects, as well as market-based solutions to climate change, pose serious threats not only to Indigenous women's spiritual and reciprocal relationship to water, but also to the well-being of Indigenous communities and the whole of humanity. It is thus with urgent concern that we respectfully ask the Permanent Forum to take a leading role in promoting and protecting Indigenous Peoples' right to water and that UN agencies, states, and transnational corporations, use a human-right framework to address problems such as the lack of access to clean and potable water for sustaining life, the pollution of waterways, human-induced droughts, the unsustainable extraction of water, among others.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We support and endorse the recommendations made in the document submitted by the American Indian Law Alliance and Seventh Generation Fund at the 10<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Permanent Forum (E/C.19/2011/CRP.6). In particular, we would like to highlight the following recommendations:

1. We urge the UN Permanent Forum to recommend to ECOSOC, in coordination with UNEP, to organize a UN Expert Meeting on Water that initiates a close review and assessment of water allocation, regulation and access policies that affect the rights of Indigenous Peoples; and that explores and establishes indicators of water well-being.

2. We request the UN Permanent Forum to recommend the Independent Expert on the issue of human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation, to work with UNEP in an international study on water that goes beyond drinking water and sanitation issues, and includes the spiritual relationship of Indigenous Peoples to water as a crucial step in promoting and protecting their human rights.
3. We call upon the Permanent Forum to initiate a study on best practices and ongoing ecological and productive projects undertaken by Indigenous communities for generations, for water storage, preservation, and equitable distribution, paying special attention to those projects that help in adaptation and mitigation, as well as promote self-development. Furthermore, we call upon the Permanent Forum to recommend states to recognize and promote financially those local projects in order to protect the cultural, spiritual and physical relationship of Indigenous People with water, and the traditional knowledge that sustains it.
4. We support the call for and Indigenous World Conference on Water and Peace with full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples, with the objective of understanding water issues from cultural perspectives and address solutions that respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples.
5. We urge the Permanent Forum to study how the privatization, pollution and extractive technologies such as hydro-fracking of water violates and impacts the rights of Indigenous Peoples as provided in articles 3, 24, 25, 26, 29, 32 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. We also urge the Permanent Forum to provide recommendations to UN agencies, states, and transnational corporations on how to protect these Indigenous rights in order to promote the well-being of Indigenous communities and Mother Earth. Finally, we urge the Permanent Forum to recommend UN agencies, states and transnational corporations the implementation of Article 28 of UNDRIP, by which Indigenous Peoples have the right to redress in case that their resources, in this case, water, are confiscated, taken, used, or damaged without their free, prior and informed consent.
6. We call upon the Permanent Forum to denounce any actions in which national militaries, corporate private armies, paramilitary or other security groups, are used to prevent Indigenous Peoples' access to their traditional water sources upon which their physical and cultural survival depends.
7. We recommend that the Permanent Forum rejects any UN program or policy that places or defines water, including the foreshore and seabed of our oceans, within a market-based system.

We respectfully request that these recommendations be included in the final report.