

Statement by Jeannette Corbiere Lavell, President, Native Women's Association of Canada submitted on behalf of the by Native Women's Association of Canada to the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 3rd Session, July 12th to 16th, 2010, Human Rights Council, United Nations, Geneva

Item 3: Study on Indigenous Peoples and the Right to Participate in Decision-Making

The study of Indigenous peoples and the right to participate in decision-making is one that is of concern to Indigenous women in Canada and globally. The Native Women's Association of Canada welcomes the integration of Indigenous women's right to participate in the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' Progress report on the study on indigenous peoples and the right to participate in decision-making: Report of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Doc. No. A/HRC/EMRIP/2010/2.

In addition to the important references made in paragraph 13 of this report, we would like to highlight article 44 of the UN *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* states that "All the rights and freedoms recognized herein are equally guaranteed to male and female indigenous individuals." This principle of gender equality means that each right contained within the UN *Declaration* related to the right to participate in decision-making, must be equally realized by Indigenous women and men, and Indigenous girls and boys. When this is considered in light of article 3 and the right to self-determination, for instance, this is of great significance, requiring that Indigenous women sit as equals at negotiation tables and in governance structures. For example, at a domestic level, the Native Women's Association of Canada is recognized as a National Aboriginal Organization, yet we continue to strive to achieve equal recognition in all forums, from negotiating tables to policy forums. We know that our Indigenous sisters from other regions experience similar barriers to having equal access to the right to participate in decision-making. It is critical for the UN system, states and Indigenous Peoples to recognize these barriers and work towards solutions that empower Indigenous women and result in equality at all levels of participation in decision-making.

As one example of the self-determining actions of Indigenous women in the area of reproductive health and environmental justice, we would like to highlight the "Declaration for Health, Life and Defense of Our Lands, Rights and Future Generations" recently adopted by consensus on July 1st at the International Indigenous Women's Environmental and Reproductive Health Symposium. In this Declaration, Indigenous women take leadership in advancing the rights and responsibilities of Indigenous Peoples to address environmental toxins and reproductive health matters gravely affecting ourselves, our children, our Nations and our future generations.

We also take note of paragraphs 59, 60 and 65. We agree that the traditional role of Indigenous women as leaders has been negatively affected by colonization. However, the

Native Women's Association of Canada has been a strong advocate for Indigenous women and we are working toward ensuring the recognition and promotion of our right to equality in decision-making processes, ensuring that we are part of official decision-making authorities in all spheres – including, governance, health, education and cultural and spiritual development. This is done in a manner that promotes traditional governance structures that existed prior to colonization, and in some cases continue to exist today, where women's central role in leadership was respected. It is important to promote capacity-building efforts of Indigenous women in Canada and globally, to support such efforts. We invite UN agencies, states and Indigenous peoples to join our efforts to ensure that the equality rights of Indigenous women are promoted in the right to participate in all areas of decision-making.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.