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Thematic dialogues

Indigenous women and their role in the 25-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present note provides information on the progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as it relates to indigenous women from 2015 to 2020, which marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of its adoption. The information compiled is based on the national review reports prepared by Member States for the sixty-fourth session of the Commission of the Status of Women, to be held in 2020. In addition, the note highlights the substantive input of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in promoting the rights of indigenous women within global agendas, in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

* E/C.19/2020/1.



I. Introduction

1. Progress has been made in drawing attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and promoting action in that regard. Indigenous peoples' issues are now an integral part of major global agendas such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular with respect to issues of climate change, the environment and human rights.

2. However, this has not been translated into real gains for indigenous women, who continue to face discrimination and marginalization on the basis of ethnicity, race and socioeconomic status. Measures to protect indigenous women's rights must be an integral part of a holistic, intercultural and gender-based approach in the design and implementation of laws, policies and programmes aimed at addressing such issues. Any effective response to find solutions that fully respect and guarantee the rights of indigenous women needs to be developed with them and by them.

3. The role and status of indigenous women differ from one community to another, within countries and from one region to another. Their concerns, however, are often similar. Indigenous women are rights holders and not simply victims or targets of violations of their human rights. They continue to play an important role in the historic struggle for the self-determination of their peoples, their collective and individual rights and their rights as indigenous women.

4. In indigenous communities, women and men have different roles and responsibilities and consequently they also have different needs, aspirations and interests. Age is another factor that determines their roles and exposes them to specific forms of discrimination. Indigenous women elders play central roles as custodians of indigenous cultures, moral authorities, spiritual guides and healers, and are valued for their wisdom and knowledge. At the same time, they are among those who suffer most from cultural and territorial losses. Indigenous girls are specifically exposed to discrimination and violence on account of their age and their vulnerability to sexual violence and trafficking (A/HRC/30/41, para. 15).

5. With 25 years having passed since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and 20 years since the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, indigenous women continue to call upon Member States to fulfil international commitments made on gender equality and its mainstreaming into all development policies and programmes at all levels, with specific reference to themselves.

6. Five years ago, the outcome document of the high-level plenary meeting known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 69/2 and contained references to indigenous women in paragraphs 10, 17, 18 and 19. At the time, Member States recommitted themselves to upholding the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

7. The note by the Secretariat on the twenty-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (E/C.19/2015/2) provides an overview of the achievements made by indigenous women since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, at both the national and international levels, up to 2014. The present note provides information on the progress made in its implementation as it relates to indigenous women from 2015 to 2020, which marks twenty-fifth anniversary of its adoption.

8. The note is also focused on key areas within global agendas since 2015 in which the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, in its recommendations, promotes the rights of indigenous women in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

9. The note also provides a brief analysis of how intergovernmental bodies and mechanisms, such as the Permanent Forum, the Commission on the Status of Women, the high-level political forum on sustainable development and the General Assembly, have advanced the rights of indigenous women.

II. Achievements since 2015: action at the international level

A. Global agendas and indigenous women

10. The following provides a snapshot of some of the achievements in global agendas related to indigenous women since 2015.

11. Indigenous peoples, including indigenous women, as well as the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, took an active role in the consultation and negotiation processes that led to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda (see General Assembly resolution [70/155](#)). The 2030 Agenda contains six specific references to indigenous peoples: three in the political declaration, two in the targets under Sustainable Development Goals 2 on zero hunger (target 2.3) and 4 on education (target 4.5) and one in the follow-up and review section, in which States expressed their commitment to engage with indigenous peoples in the implementation of the Goals and were encouraged to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress in achieving them, including at the national level, and to draw upon the contributions of indigenous peoples in those reviews (Assembly resolution [70/1](#), para. 79). The Permanent Forum has been providing input and analysis for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, working in close cooperation with the indigenous peoples major group. It has also included in its annual sessions a standing agenda item on the 2030 Agenda in order to gather input and suggestions on better integrating the rights of indigenous peoples and indigenous women into the process at the global, regional and country levels.

12. In 2015, States adopted two other outcome documents that contain specific references to indigenous peoples: the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (see General Assembly resolution [69/313](#)), in which States recognized that indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge, innovations and practices could support sustainable livelihoods, while also calling for a focus on indigenous peoples in the context of social protection; and the Paris Agreement, in which States highlighted the importance of indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge in combating climate change. Both outcome documents are also relevant to indigenous women owing to their imperative role in preserving, developing, shaping and transmitting traditional knowledge.

13. In 2018, indigenous women were also involved in the processes of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform Facilitative Working Group, which was established by the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change at its twenty-fourth session, held in Katowice, Poland. In that regard, the Permanent Forum invited the Platform to collaborate closely with intergovernmental processes beyond those linked to the Framework Convention on matters relating to climate change and indigenous peoples, in accordance with its mandate (Conference of the Parties decision [2/CP.24](#), para. 20; [E/2019/43](#), para. 87). Four indigenous women are among the 14 representatives who are members of the platform, half of whom are representatives of States parties and half of whom are representatives of indigenous peoples' organizations. The platform was established in recognition of the role of indigenous peoples as stewards of critical ecosystems, who are on the front line of efforts to address the impacts of climate change.

14. In 2019, indigenous women also participated in the summit held in Nairobi to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and

Development. In that regard, the Permanent Forum recommended that the United Nations Population Fund organize an event on indigenous women in the context of the conference (E/2019/43, para. 88). As a result, Tarcila Rivera Zea and Mariam Wallet Aboubakrine, members of the Permanent Forum, as well as other indigenous women, participated in the session entitled “Progress for indigenous women and girls”. Participants assessed the progress achieved in meeting the promise made to indigenous peoples at the International Conference on Population and Development, highlighting the barriers to ensuring full access to sexual and reproductive health and rights and protection from gender-based violence. They called upon States and the United Nations system to disseminate, implement and follow up on the recommendations of the Permanent Forum, which include measures related to population and development.¹

15. In 2019, in the context of the Climate Action Summit convened by the Secretary-General, the Permanent Forum urged Member States to include indigenous peoples’ rights in the outcomes of the Summit and recommended that States, the United Nations system, indigenous peoples’ organizations and other partners secure funding to ensure the adequate participation of indigenous peoples in the Summit and its preparatory meetings. As a result, a preparatory meeting for indigenous peoples was hosted by the Government of Mexico. As follow-up, the world indigenous peoples’ initiative was presented at the Summit in New York on 23 September. Indigenous women participated and contributed to the discussions and reflected on indigenous peoples’ commitments climate action.

16. Indigenous women also participated in the negotiations conducted in December 2019 ahead of the twenty-fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which was held in Madrid, through various advocacy efforts, including side events, press conferences and bilateral meetings. Parties adopted a decision on the enhanced Lima work programme on gender and its gender action plan. In the decision, the States, recognizing with concern that the impacts of climate change on women and men could often differ owing to historical and current gender inequalities and multidimensional factors and could be more pronounced in developing countries and for local communities and indigenous peoples, and acknowledging that climate change was a common concern of humankind, noted that they should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their obligations with respect to human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, the empowerment of women and intergenerational equity.

17. The decision sets a historic precedent for the inclusion of rights-based language within the policies and practices adopted by countries and will guide gender-responsive climate policy and action for the next five years.

18. Indigenous women have been calling upon the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to adopt a general recommendation on indigenous women. In support of this call, the Permanent Forum recommended that, in the general recommendation, the Committee consider issues related to individual and collective rights to equality, non-discrimination and self-determination; social and economic rights, including the rights to decent work and to land, territory and

¹ Tarcila Rivera Zea, “Indigenous peoples, women, children and youth: 25 years from Cairo”, position paper presented at the Nairobi Summit on the International Conference on Population and Development, Nairobi, November 2019. Available at www.scribd.com/document/434651930/Position-paper-Tarcila-Rivera-Zea-Nairobi-Summit-on-ICPD-25#from_embed.

resources; the right to water and food; cultural rights; civil and political rights; and the right to live free of any form of violence (E/2019/43, para. 53).

B. Intergovernmental mechanisms and indigenous women

19. The Permanent Forum continues to play a key role in addressing the situation of indigenous women and making recommendations thereon. First, it has strategically positioned the rights of indigenous women as a priority at its annual sessions, either as the special theme or as one of the substantive areas, and has advocated, through its recommendations, concrete action to include their rights and perspectives in major intergovernmental frameworks. Second, it has created a global platform for indigenous women to share experiences and difficulties and exchange ideas and strategies to achieve their goals. Third, it provides an institutional venue for indigenous women to establish networks with non-governmental organizations and United Nations system entities to respond to some of the challenges that they continue to face around the world.

20. In response to indigenous women's concerns, the Permanent Forum over the years has adopted a large number of recommendations containing direct references to the situation of indigenous women in connection with a wide range of issues, including education, culture, health, human rights, environment and development, conflict and political participation.²

21. In addition, each year, the Permanent Forum has a stand-alone agenda item devoted to indigenous women's issues. For example, in 2016, it held a session entitled "Indigenous peoples: conflict, peace and resolution", and one of the two plenary meetings was focused on the unique case of indigenous women. Among its other recommendations, the Permanent Forum emphasized that the protection, security and rights of indigenous girls and women in conflict settings constituted an urgent priority, including within the framework of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. It also noted that sexual and gender-based violence increased in settings of conflict. Sexual violence has also been systematically used as a weapon of war against indigenous women. In the light of the particular risks and vulnerabilities of indigenous women and girls related to sexual and gender-based violence, the Permanent Forum recommended that Governments, local authorities, specialized agencies of the United Nations system and civil society collaborate with indigenous peoples to establish multisectoral and holistic approaches to combat the various forms of violence against women and girls (E/2016/43, paras. 56 and 57).

22. One of the mandates of the Permanent Forum is to raise awareness of and promote the rights of indigenous peoples. In line with this mandate, in 2017, the Permanent Forum launched the first indigenous media zone in cooperation with indigenous community media to provide a space for indigenous and mainstream media channels and platforms to cover the issues discussed during the sessions in their own languages and through their own media channels. Indigenous women also used this platform to broadcast on issues such as violence against indigenous women and girls, female genital mutilation and the economic empowerment of indigenous women and young people.³ The participation of indigenous women in the media zone has increased over the years, with indigenous women taking the lead in designing the agenda and the briefings.

² Information on additional activities relating to indigenous women is available at www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/mandated-areas1/indigenous-women.html.

³ See www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/unpfii-sessions-2/sixteenth-session.html.

23. In 2017, in commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Commission on the Status of Women held an interactive dialogue at its sixty-first session on the focus area “Empowerment of indigenous women” (E/CN.6/2017/12). This was in response to a call made in 2014 in the outcome document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (General Assembly resolution 69/2, para. 19), and a recommendation of the Permanent Forum (E/C.19/2015/10, para. 43) to consider indigenous women as a priority theme. The interactive dialogue marked the first time that the subject of indigenous women had been discussed as a stand-alone topic at an official meeting of the Commission. In the discussion on gender violence, education and economic opportunity for women, many speakers also called for increased consultation with indigenous women on environmental issues, especially climate change. They noted in particular that indigenous women’s knowledge and capacities could provide solutions to climate change.

24. Every year, the General Assembly adopts a resolution on the rights of indigenous peoples, which is discussed by the Third Committee.⁴ The Assembly refers in these resolutions to issues of particular relevance to indigenous women, such as violence against indigenous women and girls and their empowerment and full and effective participation in decision-making processes at all levels, and encourages States to consider including in their reports information on indigenous women in relation to the progress made and challenges faced in the implementation of Commission on the Status of Women resolutions 49/7 of 11 March 2005, entitled “Indigenous women: beyond the ten-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action” (E/2005/27, chap. I, sect. D), and 56/4 of 9 March 2012, entitled “Indigenous women: key actors in poverty and hunger eradication” (E/2012/27, chap. I, sect. D). It is relevant to note that the annual report of the Permanent Forum contributes to the analysis and rationale used to address the rights of indigenous women at the highest levels of the United Nations.

25. Following on from the International Year of Indigenous Languages, and in order to continue to draw attention to the critical loss of such languages, the General Assembly, in its resolution 74/135, proclaimed the period 2022–2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. The aim is to preserve, revitalize and promote indigenous languages and to take urgent steps in this regard at the national and international levels. The Permanent Forum played a pivotal role in raising awareness of the urgency of the issue through expert group meetings and other events (E/C.19/2019/4, sect. IV). For indigenous women and girls, who play a key role as transmitters of their identity, culture and languages, the Decade will be an opportunity to strengthen support and action to preserve and transmit their languages, take active roles in decision-making bodies and gain access to justice and critical services such as education and health care.

26. The 25-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action will be an opportunity to measure actions to advance the rights of women. In that regard, in its resolutions on the rights of indigenous peoples adopted at its seventy-third and seventy-fourth sessions (resolutions 73/156, para. 21; and 74/135, para. 22), the General Assembly invited the Commission on the Status of Women to consider indigenous women’s issues, among others, at its sixty-fourth session, to be held in 2020, to coincide with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women. In the resolutions, the Assembly also encouraged Governments to cooperate with indigenous peoples at all levels on preparations for

⁴ The General Assembly allocates to the Third Committee agenda items relating to a range of social, humanitarian affairs and human rights issues that affect people all over the world. See www.un.org/en/ga/third.

the review in 2020 in order to benefit from their experience and expertise. The Permanent Forum also reiterated its recommendation that the Commission organize a high-level interactive dialogue on the rights of indigenous women to coincide with the anniversary (E/C.19/2019/10, para. 54). In preparation for the activities that are part of the 25-year review and appraisal process, indigenous women will meet at the second World Conference of Indigenous Women, in 2020, which is organized by the International Indigenous Women's Forum, in cooperation with regional indigenous women's networks, and hosted by the Sami women's forum.

III. Analysis of country-level implementation based on national reviews presented to the Commission on the Status of Women

27. This section provides a brief analysis of the situation of indigenous women on the following themes selected from among the 12 critical areas identified in the Beijing Platform of Action: women and poverty; education and training of women; women and the environment; women and armed conflict; women and health; and women and the media. The six themes are the three in which Member States mention indigenous women the most and the three in which they mention them the least. As such, the themes to which the highest attention is paid and those that need more attention are covered. The section also provides information on the consideration and implementation of issues in national reviews submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women for its sixty-fourth session, in 2020. In total, over 150 States submitted national reviews, about one third of which mentioned indigenous peoples. The majority of the States that mentioned indigenous peoples were in the Central and South America and the Caribbean region, followed by the Africa region. It marked an increase from the number of national reviews submitted in 2015 for the 20-year review, when 35 States included specific information on indigenous women. A brief overview of the situation, progress made and challenges that indigenous women confront is provided below for each of the selected themes, followed by some examples of good practices provided by States.⁵

A. Indigenous women and poverty

28. There are more than 370 million indigenous people (5 per cent of the global population) in the world, but they make up 15 per cent of the world's poorest people. Through national legal and policy frameworks in which indigenous rights are recognized, respected and promoted, progress has been made towards the social and economic development of indigenous peoples. Colonialism has, in many cases, caused impoverishment, which persists regardless of important advances in the recognition of their distinct identities as indigenous peoples. The recognition of indigenous peoples' rights is a prerequisite for the advancement of their social and economic development. In order to achieve such development for indigenous peoples, development strategies based on their own definitions and indicators of poverty and well-being are crucial. The lack of data disaggregated by ethnicity and sex remains a challenge in this regard, which few countries have addressed.⁶

29. In this context, there is a need to identify the trends and structural causes of poverty that affect the lives of indigenous women, such as issues relating to land

⁵ Please note that the examples outlined are illustrative only; for more detail, please see the individual national review, which are available from www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw64-2020/preparations#national-level-reviews.

⁶ *State of the World's Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations publications, Sales No. 09.VI.13), p. 22.

rights, and to make all efforts to empower them through increased employment, access to education, access to health care, the protection of cultural practices and socioeconomic autonomy.

30. Indigenous women are mentioned in the context of poverty in approximately one third of the national reviews. These include references to projects and funding for housing, access to food and safety nets and other means of poverty reduction. Some illustrative examples are described below.

31. In Canada, the national housing strategy of 2017 includes a 10-year plan to help to ensure that people have access to safe and affordable housing. It prioritizes the most vulnerable people, including women and indigenous peoples. Throughout 2017, the Government of Canada conducted public consultations that showed that indigenous women might be at greater risk of food insecurity and poverty owing to factors such as the ongoing effects of colonialism. These findings were integrated into a policy in which the intersectionality of social, health, environmental and economic aspects of the food system were recognized.

32. In Honduras, the Vida Mejor programme was focused on vulnerable populations in poverty and extreme poverty between 2014 and 2019, and benefited Afro-Honduran and indigenous women. The Government also implemented subprogrammes aimed at contributing to the reduction of poverty and extreme poverty in rural areas. The objective of the subprogrammes was to improve the income, employment opportunities, food security and living conditions of the rural poor, with a focus on social inclusion and gender equity.

33. The Government of Namibia established a joint gender programme in cooperation with United Nations entities, that contributed to, inter alia, poverty alleviation through the economic empowerment of rural women, with a focus on indigenous San and young people. The programme contributed to improving the food security conditions of rural women and young people through the introduction of appropriate technology and training.

34. The Government of Nepal has introduced a micro-enterprise development programme in the past two decades, aimed at supporting an economic base for rural and indigenous women. The aim is to reduce poverty through women's entrepreneurship and employment, especially for women from poor, Dalit and indigenous communities in the country. The programme provides training and technical assistance for micro-enterprise development. Of the 142,437 entrepreneurs supported by the time of the national review, 75 per cent were women, of which 40 per cent were indigenous women.

35. In the Philippines, the modified conditional cash transfer programme responds to the unique needs of poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged families that are not covered by the regular conditional cash transfer programme. As at February 2019, 76 per cent of the 228,322 beneficiaries were indigenous peoples in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas. The programme provides a modified package of benefits, interventions and modes of implementation until families can be covered by the regular programme.

B. Education and training of indigenous women

36. Education is one of the most important determinants of health and of economic and social well-being. Access to higher education can lead to better quality and higher-paying jobs and to reduced unemployment, all of which affect health outcomes.

37. For indigenous peoples, education is the primary means of ensuring their individual and collective development; it is a precondition for their ability to realize

their right to self-determination, including their right to pursue their own economic, social and cultural development (A/HRC/12/33, annex, paras. 2 and 4). Education is also viewed as a means of empowering them to articulate their concerns at the local, national and international levels and to gain the support of civil society organizations in advocating for their rights. In some instances, however, education is perceived as a way to assimilate indigenous peoples into mainstream society and to eradicate of their cultures, languages and ways of life.

38. For indigenous women, formal education has enabled them to advocate that concrete measures be put in place to address their perceptions and experiences of inequalities, discrimination and marginalization, and to develop strategies to overcome those. Nevertheless, the right to education has not been fully realized for most indigenous men and women, and a critical education gap exists between indigenous peoples and the general population, which is even greater for indigenous women and girls. Priority must be given to identifying special measures to overcome gender barriers to education at all levels for indigenous women and girls, including socioeconomic and cultural limitations. Some measures could be the establishment of special programmes for indigenous women and girls that are culturally appropriate and may need to include economic assistance and incentives to facilitate access to, and retention in, education for indigenous girls so as to encourage them to complete their education and to seek higher education. Indigenous women's empowerment programmes, community infrastructure development programmes and income-generating activities, as well as vocational training and adult literacy education programmes, are also essential. Similarly, there is a need to discuss the importance of equal access to education for indigenous women and girls within indigenous communities and to reinforce the understanding among communities of the need for indigenous women and girls to have access to and acquire an education, on an equal basis with men and boys. In such contexts it may be necessary to provide awareness-raising education so as to address cultural and societal norms and practices that may be gender-biased.

39. Approximately half the States reported on the issue of indigenous women and education. The information provided is related, inter alia, to efforts to: increase literacy among indigenous women; encourage school attendance and completion rates among female indigenous students; improve access to education; and provide education in indigenous languages and in culturally appropriate ways. Some examples are outlined in the paragraphs below.

40. Australia reported that the Government has invested in activities designed to help over 25,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students engage in and complete their education and make successful post-school transitions. The activities include mentoring, leadership and education projects, from which where more than 15,500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and young women have benefited.

41. Cameroon facilitated education through the schooling of 5,250 Baka, Bedzang, Bakola and Bagyeli children in primary school and 350 children in secondary school. Furthermore, 480 teachers were trained in special tools to improve their educational approach towards indigenous children. A total of 47 primary schools for indigenous children were supported with school supplies and textbooks, payment of fees relating to certificates of completion of primary education and competitions, among other things.

42. Guyana reported an improvement in indigenous peoples' access to education through the construction of nursery and primary schools and the provision of 13 residential secondary schools for over 5,500 students in hinterland regions. Access to local and international scholarships for students living in those regions to pursue secondary and tertiary education also enhanced the empowerment of girls.

43. In Malaysia, the Department of Orang Asli Development (known as JAKOA) introduced a reading encouragement programme, as part of which 45 Orang Asli women have been appointed as volunteers to teach children in their community, between the ages of 2 and 4 years old, to read. Furthermore, 281 Orang Asli women have been appointed as preschool teaching assistants to help teachers monitor the well-being of the children, including by preparing balanced and nutritious meals for Orang Asli children in preschool.

44. In Panama, since 2014, the National Institute for Vocational Training and Training for Human Development has given courses through its gender entrepreneurship programme to empower indigenous women. Courses in gastronomy, porciculture, art crafts, welding, bakery and construction have been conducted. In 2017 such projects for empowering women's entrepreneurship and businesses were developed in rural and indigenous communities (*comarcas*) such as Emberá, Guna Yala and Ngäbe Buglé.

C. Indigenous women and the environment

45. Issues of the environment, sustainable development, biodiversity and climate change involve a wide range of rights enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including the basic right of indigenous peoples to self-determination.

46. Indigenous women and men are crucial agents of change to combat climate change. Their unique and different perspectives complement one another. Indigenous women play a role in the indigenous peoples' stewardship of their lands, territories and resources as well as their interaction with nature and practice of sustainable resource management and biodiversity protection. Indigenous women also play a critical role in food security in the indigenous peoples' subsistence economy, as they are the main food producers.⁷ For these reasons, indigenous women are most likely to experience the first and worst effects of climate change globally, thus they are often found on the frontlines of resistance campaigns – defending their lands, their rights and the health of the environment.

47. For indigenous peoples, their lands, territories and resources are the source of livelihood, medicine, intellectual property, food security and spiritual well-being. Land is not only a factor of production. For indigenous women, this also signifies Mother Earth, life, dignity, the basis for their culture, spirituality, beliefs, their survival, food systems and traditional medicine. Thus, the loss of their lands, territories and resources results in the deterioration of their capacities to survive and of their resilience.

48. In their national reviews, several States provided information about programmes and projects of relevance to indigenous women and the environment that cover a range of issues. These include facilitating the participation of indigenous women in environmental risk management, promoting the application of traditional knowledge and strengthening indigenous women's access to land and natural resources.

49. The Congo, as one of the signatories to the Kyoto Protocol, reiterated its commitment to involving women and indigenous peoples in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of laws and programmes on disaster risk reduction and resilience to climate change. The country has been developing its programme on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest

⁷ International Forum of Indigenous Women and indigenous peoples major group for sustainable development, "Continuing discrimination and disempowerment of indigenous women", report presented at the high-level political forum on sustainable development, New York, July 2019.

carbon stocks in developing countries (REDD+) in four intervention areas (Haut-Katanga, Kongo Central, Lomami and Kwilu), which involved the engagement of women and children through capacity-building training programmes and project support.

50. Kenya reported women being elected as elders within the Maasai and Kalenjin communities through its project on enhancing customary justice systems, which was established in partnership with the United States Agency for International Development and a non-governmental organization, Landesa. In two Ol Pusimoru communities, 14 women elders were elected, out of a total of 50 elders, thereby ensuring indigenous women's involvement in decision-making and a transformation of discriminatory practices. The project was aimed at realizing indigenous women's land rights in the Mau Forest and focused on harmonizing formal and informal justice systems.

51. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Water, Land and Natural Resources, through the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia, is implementing a project on the application of traditional knowledge towards shared benefits and an increase in the living standards of the Orang Asli people. The project involves documentation of the traditional knowledge on medicinal plants of the 18 ethnic groups of the Orang Asli, the development of research plots and the mapping of the distribution of medicinal plants. Around 58 per cent of participants were Orang Asli women, who played a significant role in ensuring the success of each activity.

52. Norway reported on measures to promote gender equality in reindeer hunting. It was highlighted that in 2016, 14 per cent of 537 *siida* (reindeer pastoralism district) shares, and 24 per cent of the total number of reindeers, belonged to women. In addition, the Reindeer Agreement allows women to apply for funding support.

53. Suriname reported on actions to lower the vulnerability of indigenous populations to the increased frequency of flooding. The National Coordination Centre for Disaster Management strives to ensure the effective participation of indigenous women in discussions regarding disaster management and coordination, including response and prevention, and works with an increasing number of indigenous traditional authorities, including women.

D. Indigenous women and conflict

54. Indigenous peoples are often among the most vulnerable groups as a result of poverty, political marginalization and systemic discrimination. They are often involved in situations of conflict, mostly relating to their lands, territories and resources or their civil, political, cultural, social and economic rights. In nearly every region of the world, indigenous peoples are being displaced and severely affected by violence on their lands and territories. In some countries, indigenous peoples are victims of massacres carried out by the army or paramilitary groups during conflicts.

55. The situation of indigenous women is worse, as they have been used as the "spoils of war" and subjected to sexual violence and rape. In some cases, indigenous children are forcibly recruited to participate in armed conflicts, leaving behind their homes and their childhood (E/2016/43, para. 49). Therefore, violent conflicts and militarization affect their lives, the life of their families and communities, leading to violations of their human rights and displacement from their ancestral lands and territories. Yet indigenous women do not see themselves as passive victims but have taken up the roles of mediators and peacebuilders (E/2004/43, para. 13) making use

of their experience as well as their unique perspectives as indigenous women to prevent conflict and create justice.⁸

56. From the national reviews submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women, a limited number of States addressed the issues of indigenous women and peace and conflict. Some of the contributions are outlined in the paragraphs below.

57. Colombia reported that the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace contains chapters on issues including gender and indigenous peoples. The rights of indigenous peoples to their ancestral territories are recognized in the agreement, and their contributions to peace are also acknowledged therein. The Government recognizes that, despite its many efforts to implement the agreement, social leaders, including indigenous peoples, continue to face threats and harassments that often lead to killings.

58. The Democratic Republic of the Congo reported on the development of its updated national action plan adopted in 2018 that contains provisions for the integration of the needs of indigenous women and young people, among other vulnerable social groups, who are victims of armed conflict. The objective is to protect their rights but also to ensure their participation in matters relating to armed conflict. In this effort, the plan involved capacity development for indigenous women in support of their candidacy in electoral processes. The plan supports the implementation of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#).

59. Guatemala adopted its first national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women and peace and security in 2017. The plan seeks to transform the status and position of women in the post-conflict context. Starting in 2013, the inter-institutional round table on women and peace and security (Mesa Interinstitucional sobre Mujeres, Paz y Seguridad, known as Mimpaz) and women's organizations, including representatives of indigenous women, were involved in the development of the plan, which reflected the demands and specific needs of women survivors of the internal armed conflict, mainly for victims of sexual violence.

60. The Philippines reported on the 2017–2022 national action plan on women and peace and security, which highlights women's agency, as both leaders and participants in the country's peace process, through formal and informal spaces. The five-year plan aims to support various initiatives through which women empower other women, to recognize the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity and religion, and to build a stronger constituency for peace and conflict transformation so that women who are involved on the frontlines are involved throughout the process.

61. Myanmar reported that at the Union Peace Conference of 2018, the participation of women increased to 17 per cent, a 2 per cent increase from the previous session. Among the participants, there were also 31 women among the 150 delegates representing the 10 ethnic armed groups that signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.

E. Indigenous women and health

62. Indigenous peoples worldwide are experiencing an imbalance in their physical and spiritual environment as well as sociocultural, demographic and nutritional changes that have a profound impact on their health. Regardless of their geographical location or sociopolitical situation, health indicators are always poorer for indigenous peoples than for non-indigenous ones. The determinants of this gap are multiple and

⁸ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), "Indigenous women and the women, peace and security agenda", research brief, 2017.

interconnected, therefore any response to this critical situation must be holistic. Indigenous peoples suffer from lower life expectancy and from high rates of infant and child mortality, of maternal morbidity and mortality, of substance abuse and of depression, among others. The effects of colonization, the loss of ancestral land, exclusion, inequality and cultural barriers for access to health care are among the most striking issues characterizing the poor health situation of indigenous peoples.⁹

63. For indigenous women, those challenges are more severe than they are for indigenous men, as a result of their different biological health profile and gender inequalities. Despite having a lower rate of mortality than indigenous men, indigenous women's rate of morbidity is higher, mainly due to their triple burden¹⁰ of reproductive, domestic and productive labour.

64. Furthermore, indigenous women continue to experience persistent and disproportionate inequities in access to health and health-care services due to discriminatory practices of mainstream health-care providers and discrimination with regard to the traditional health practices of indigenous women, such as indigenous midwifery. There is therefore an urgent need to focus on health issues, including sexual and reproductive health, as well as on alternative health-care frameworks that include their traditional health practices.

65. Around a third of States referred to activities relating to indigenous women and health. The health inequalities between indigenous and non-indigenous people are addressed through efforts to develop health-care strategies in collaboration with indigenous communities, improve access to health facilities and sanitary environments, and provide sensitive support for the specific needs of indigenous women.

66. Australia shared information on the integration of indigenous midwifery within the national health-care system. The Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Health Service in New South Wales aims to improve the health of Aboriginal women during pregnancy and decrease perinatal morbidity and mortality for Aboriginal babies. Midwives and Aboriginal health workers collaborate to provide a high-quality maternity service that is culturally sensitive and focuses on women.

67. Bangladesh invested in several infrastructure projects that improved the health of indigenous communities and specifically helped save time and labour for indigenous women. Through 3,800 community-based service providing centres (known as *para kendro*), health and nutrition services, and pure drinking water were provided to families in the three hill districts.

68. In Canada, the federal Government has established a new Advisory Committee on Indigenous Women's Well-being to provide advice on current and emerging health issues. The committee will consist of representatives from national indigenous organizations, national indigenous women's organizations, the National Aboriginal Council of Midwives, and other representatives. The traditional practice of midwifery is recognized through health-care programmes that cater to the specific needs of pregnant indigenous women and families with young children. The maternal and child health programme provides for home visits by nurses and by distant family members to over 8,100 pregnant women and families in First Nations communities.

69. Colombia recognized female genital mutilation as a form of violence that affects the life and health of girls and women, specifically those belonging to indigenous

⁹ Centro de Culturas Indígenas del Perú, *Population, Development and Indigenous Women: Perspective and Proposal 20 Years after the VI International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo plus 20* (2014).

¹⁰ The "triple burden of labour" refers to women's three spheres of labour: productive labour (wage earning or income generating activities), reproductive labour (childbirth and care), and domestic labour (food preparation, washing, cooking, cleaning, water and firewood collection, etc.).

peoples. The two strategies aimed at eliminating female genital mutilation within the national development plan 2014–2018 guarantee resources for indigenous communities to develop intergenerational dialogue and provide attention and follow-up to victims of female genital mutilation. Guidelines for the care and promotion of sexual and reproductive health among indigenous communities were developed in alignment with indigenous authorities.

70. In 2018, the national plan of action for indigenous peoples was approved in El Salvador. The action plan sets out the strategic guidelines that will allow the State, in coordination with indigenous peoples, to implement the strategies and achieve the proposed results with a deep commitment to human rights and the rights of indigenous peoples and women's rights. In this context a national health plan for indigenous peoples was introduced, focusing on health and taking into consideration cultural and gender-specific issues, as well as promoting indigenous knowledge in the health-care system.

71. New Zealand reported on the Government's health strategies for Maori and for Pacific (Korowai Oranga and Ala Mo'ui, respectively) people, families and communities that aims to eliminate the unacceptable health inequalities between indigenous and non-indigenous populations. Both strategies consist of measurable health outcomes and considerations for localized and culturally sensitive support. Special programmes that address the prevalence of cervical cancer, human papillomavirus and smoking among indigenous women and girls were highlighted.

F. Indigenous women and the media

72. Indigenous peoples have developed their own media with the aim of changing the negative discourse and stereotypes of indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples' self-representation is visible throughout different media, including feature film, documentary, animation, television, radio, social media and journalism. Indigenous peoples use the media to combat discrimination, advocate the realization of their rights and their access to territories and resources, and to preserve their cultures, languages, spirituality and traditions. By representing themselves in a variety of media, indigenous peoples are also challenging misleading mainstream narratives, creating solidarity across national borders, reinforcing their collective rights and bringing human rights violations to international attention. Digital connectivity also supports indigenous peoples' innovation and promotes their access to alternative economic opportunities, on their own terms and according to their cultures and values.¹¹

73. For indigenous women, media are used as a tool for exercising their rights to self-determination, to enable their empowerment through reclaiming their narratives, allowing them to be voices for social change in the fight against gender discrimination, racism and human rights violations. Indigenous women are using media to share their experiences and work towards ensuring their full enjoyment of human rights, despite facing scrutiny in their communities and from relatives for so-called abandonment of their chores as women.

74. For instance, social media is transforming the way that indigenous peoples interact and connect with each other at all levels, facilitating such interaction and allowing users to maintain relationships across national borders, regions and time zones.¹² Such media also help to raise awareness of campaigns relating to violence

¹¹ Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, "Indigenous media, empowering indigenous voices", concept note, 23 July 2012.

¹² Alex Wilson, Bronwyn Lee Carlson and Acushla Sciascia, "Reterritorialising social media: indigenous people rise up", *Australasian Journal of Information Systems*, vol. 21 (2017).

against indigenous women, including cases of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. This can increase social and political connectivity among indigenous peoples beyond communities and borders. It can also create the opportunity to increase awareness, promote action, create communities and address violations of their rights.

75. Several national reviews contained information on the provision of basic communication services and political awareness and engagement through such services. States mention providing equipment, securing culturally sensitive broadcasting and promoting indigenous culture and identity, among other initiatives.

76. The Plurinational State of Bolivia adopted the comprehensive law to guarantee women a life free from violence (Law No. 348), which broadens protections for women against various forms of violence and establishes the eradication of violence against women as a priority of the State. In addition, the same law requires that media (radio, television, newspaper and digital media) disseminate content that prevents violence against women. A total of 59 community radio stations were established and given to Bartolina Sisa, the umbrella indigenous women's organization. Radio Nativa has been established with the aim to produce material on indigenous women's rights, culture and identity.

77. In Canada, the Canadian broadcasting system, through programming and employment opportunities arising out of its operations, is required to serve the needs, interests, circumstances and aspirations, of Canadian men, women and children, including through respect for equal rights, the linguistic duality and the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canadian society, and for the special place of indigenous peoples, according to the regulations of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

78. Libya reported that in recent years, there has been a significant increase in the involvement of women in the media sector. Women from the ethnic communities of Amazigh, Tubu and Tuareg travelled to the capital to participate in television programmes supervised by the Ministry of Labour.

79. Peru highlighted actions for the political empowerment of women through the use of information and communications technology. In the context of the regional municipal elections in 2014 and 2016, campaigns and communication strategies to promote the electoral participation of women and young indigenous peoples in the lists of candidates were implemented. Online courses were held to increase the participation of women in elections. Peru also identified cases of political harassment during the election period and institutionalized follow-up on such cases.

80. In Sweden, there is an ongoing discussion in the media and among academics regarding how different groups in society, including indigenous women and girls, are depicted in the media. The press adheres to the rules of press ethics, which discourage the highlighting of gender, ethnic origin, nationality or religious beliefs of people concerned if it is of no significance in the context or is disparaging.

IV. Conclusion and recommendations

81. The adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, signified global consensus on indigenous peoples' rights. This international legal framework covers a range of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights, from self-determination to land and labour rights. It protects access to health care, religious freedom and the rights of indigenous peoples, including children and women. It has laid the foundation for the adoption of other international commitments, including the outcome document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in 2014, in which Member States expressed their commitment to

achieving the goals of the Declaration. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Agenda call for the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, everywhere. Thus, at the global level there are robust international frameworks for promoting indigenous peoples' and women's rights. Yet, the diversity of indigenous peoples has also at times led to misunderstandings and misconceptions of their distinct identities.

82. The present note is an invitation to States and others to follow good practices and use the Beijing Platform for Action and other agreed frameworks to promote awareness of and efforts to address indigenous women's issues. The level of implementation varies between States depending on: the capacity to address indigenous peoples' and gender issues, such as legal, political and institutional frameworks; budgetary aspects; gender-disaggregated data; and the capacity to apply human rights-based approaches.

83. The present note is also an invitation to States and others to ensure that the concerns and priorities of indigenous women are fully taken into account, to take concrete steps to increase their participation in governance and decision-making structures at all levels, to develop and strengthen structures and mechanisms for the advancement of indigenous women within the wider agenda for the advancement of women, and to provide support from the highest level of Government to those structures.

84. The participation of indigenous women and the inclusion of issues of concern to them in the work of the Commission on the Status of Women is slowly growing. **Therefore, in order to further enhance this growth, the Commission could be invited to consider indigenous women as a priority theme in its future sessions to be held before 2025. Furthermore, the Commission could be invited to increase the representation of indigenous women in its official meetings and other notable events, including the commemoration of International Women's Day.**

85. States could consider specifically reporting on progress made and challenges in the implementation of the resolutions of the Commission on the Status of Women on issues relating to indigenous women's rights.¹³

86. In the analysis of the national reviews to the Commission on the Status of Women, it is evident that the availability of disaggregated data on the situation of indigenous women remains very limited. **In order to better reflect and appropriately address the challenges specific to indigenous women it is urgent to have specific data disaggregated not only by sex, but also by ethnicity. Similarly, there is a need to implement and strengthen national censuses and data collection on socioeconomic and well-being indicators, including in relation to violence against indigenous women and girls.**

87. On a final note, conflict, militarization, trafficking in humans, sex trafficking and sexual violence, among other issues, in relation to indigenous women and girls are increasingly being reported. The Forum has on several occasions reiterated the importance of ensuring peace and security in the lives of indigenous women and girls. **States could further explore ways to address those challenges, in full cooperation with indigenous peoples, and implement all international commitments to improve the lives of indigenous women and girls.**

¹³ Commission on the Status of Women resolutions 49/7 of 11 March 2005, entitled "Indigenous women: beyond the ten-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action", and 56/4 of 9 March 2012, entitled "Indigenous women: key actors in poverty and hunger eradication".