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**Indigenous Women's Caucus Intervention  
Fifth Session of the Permanent Forum  
Agenda Item 3: Special Theme: Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and  
Indigenous Peoples: Re-Defining the Goals**

In relation to all the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Indigenous Women's Caucus highlights the need to take a rights-based approach in the implementation and monitoring of strategies for achieving the MDGs. It is only when the individual and collective human rights of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous women are fully realized that we can realistically expect to reach the set goals.

The Indigenous Women's Caucus makes the following recommendations regarding the MDGs:

**1. ERADICATE POVERTY AND HUNGER**

**We reaffirm last year's statement regarding MDGs 1 and 2:**

Indigenous Peoples have not always been poor and hungry. Undisturbed, our traditional cultures supported sustainable economies. Contemporary poverty and hunger have causes that must be named in order to counteract them. In the case of Indigenous Peoples, poverty and hunger result largely from the actions of governments and transnational corporations (TNCs) that appropriate Indigenous land, territories, and resources without our free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC). The U.N., affiliated agencies like the World Bank, and states must therefore:

- Prevent outside agents from engaging in further intrusion and destruction of our land, territories and resources without our FPIC.
- Initiate and support measures that secure the rights of Indigenous Peoples to our lands, territories and resources so that we may maintain, or rebuild, collective and sustainable livelihoods in conformity with our own values and cosmovisions.

**2. ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION**

Emphasizing that this goal must not in any way be allowed to reduce or alter opportunities for Indigenous Peoples to pursue and benefit from all levels of education, the denial of which would marginalize us in the larger society, we make the following recommendations:

- Primary education that is made available to Indigenous children, girls and boys, must be conducted in their own languages as well as those prevalent in the states in which they live.
- In addition, all primary education should, in form and content, be intercultural, and demonstrate full respect and recognition of Indigenous cultures.
- Finally, primary education should introduce the concept of human rights, individual and collective, in their curricula.

**In relation to MDG #2, we emphasize the critical importance of:**

- Maintaining, promoting and revitalize our cultures and acquiring education through traditional forms of culture including our social, cultural and spiritual life ways.

**3. PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER WOMEN**

The role of Indigenous women is critical to the sustainability of Indigenous cultures. Indigenous men and women shared complimentary roles. We are reaffirming our traditional roles and rights to leadership and self-determination within our families, communities and societies on a global level. This means advancing both the collective and individual rights of Indigenous women, particularly the right to live free from violence. It is only when Indigenous women regain their rightful place as full and equal participants that the balance will be restored.

According to UNESCO, as the level of schooling of a woman increases the cycle of poverty for her and her children decreases. Acknowledging that the cycle of poverty is inherited from one generation to another, it is necessary to focus on valuing and revitalizing the integrity of the intercultural knowledge of Indigenous women.

- We recommend that the Permanent Forum call for the repeal of the Papal Bulls of Alexander VI that laid the foundation for the doctrine of discovery and other doctrines implemented worldwide, which have served to diminish the sovereignty and self-determination of Indigenous women's bodies and their ability to determine the leadership of their families, homes and communities.

**4. REDUCE CHILD MORTALITY**

Worldwide the high mortality rates of Indigenous children are due to poverty and extreme poverty created by states. Indigenous children have the least access to health care and basic social services. Children's mortality is preventable, but due to a lack of effective public health policies that promote preventative health and medical care the rates for Indigenous children remain far too high.

We call for a rights-based approach that would preclude these conditions from continuing to remain so high.

- Holistic solutions must be sought that integrate the health needs of both the mother and child, reflecting our realities.

**5. IMPROVE MATERNAL HEALTH**

Indigenous women are increasingly confronting the effects of loss of culture, particularly in the area of traditional knowledge in the production of food and have increasingly become dependent on the consumption of mass produced food. Consequently, due to our levels of poverty and extreme poverty, access to affordable food is limited to poor nutritional food source. Access to western (occidental) medicine has broken the connection between indigenous women and traditional knowledge.

- We recommend that the forum work towards the revitalization (reactivar) of the knowledge of traditional medicine and spiritual customs,
- Focus on preventive and interventive health care, while promoting cultural restoration.
- As the Western medical approach is imposed and privileged over traditional health care, we demand a specialization in Native Women's health. The state has to develop health

policies and programs for indigenous women (on our terms) and that partner directly with indigenous women in the design and implementation of these programs.

## **6. COMBAT HIV/AIDS, MALARIA AND OTHER DISEASES**

We know that Indigenous women have particular vulnerabilities to HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases based on the gendered racism and discrimination that lead to their socio-economic marginalization. Therefore, we call on the Permanent Forum to recommend that the measures undertaken to achieve the MDGs are gender-specific as well as culturally relevant.

One way to advance the right to health in addressing disease is to ensure access to affordable essential health care services, including drugs, in developing countries.

## **7. ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Our sacred Mother Earth that we share, is being continually put at risk by multi-national corporations, governments and other invasions onto our lands without our consent.

To guarantee environmental sustainability we must not only gain recognition of our rights to lands, resources and territories and self-determination, but we must also have peace. Our Nations are too often overtaken by military invasions and armed conflict on our lands. This leads to the loss of our traditional territories, lands and resources, and threatens the continuity of our Peoples.

Environmental degradation, including pollution, negatively impacts the health and vitality of our future generations.

- We request that the Permanent Forum recommend to states to enforce multi-lateral environmental accords which are essential to protect our human rights and the vitality of our cultures and traditional life ways.
- We ask that the Permanent Forum of the Nation states ratify the ILO Convention 169 if they have not already done so as one avenue to assure the protection of our homelands and resources.
- We recommend that the Permanent Forum call upon States to ensure the full and effective integration and adherence by the States or any corporation or agency, of Indigenous Peoples' perspectives in all international trade policies and development. Any development on our lands and territories must be based on free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous peoples.
- We request that the Forum firmly urge the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Fund to ensure that their programs benefit Indigenous peoples based on the principle of free, prior and informed consent with the equal participation of Indigenous women in relation to all unilateral and multi-lateral corporate and governmental development projects on Indigenous lands and territories.
- We ask the Forum to immediately call upon the states to ensure that their constitutions policies and practices that impact Indigenous Nations and territories are consistent with international human rights principles. This includes recognition of Indigenous peoples' permanent sovereignty over our natural resources, including surface and subsurface resources.
- We ask the Forum to urge states to ensure that the right to housing is advanced for Indigenous peoples, particularly those who have been displaced from their homelands. Safe, accessible and affordable housing for all Indigenous Peoples is a human right that is an essential part of reducing poverty.

- We immediately call for the elimination of everything related to the nuclear stream, including mining, detonation and other testing, processing, transport, and the placement of toxic waste dumps on our territories, because uranium is devastating our entire way of life and our future generations.

## **8. DEVELOP A GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT**

Indigenous women must have the right to participate fully in all processes related to development, in equal partnership with all actors in all commercial and financial systems. In particular, Nation States must engage in full consultation with Indigenous women and obtain their free, prior and informed consent. Furthermore, U.N. agencies with a mandate to monitor development activities should ensure the participation of Indigenous women at the decision-making level to ensure accountability to Indigenous communities. Employment strategies for youth must be integrated into all national development strategies.

There must be access to funding and resources to ensure adequate participation of Indigenous women. Indigenous women must be involved at all stages of the development, implementation and monitoring of potential projects, trade laws, regulations and standards.

- We encourage all states to develop an open trading and financial system that is rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory and that includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction— nationally and internationally.
- Strategies for achieving MDG #8 must focus on addressing the least developed countries' special needs. This includes tariff- and quota-free access for their exports; enhanced debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries; cancellation of official bilateral debt; and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction. Further, it includes landlocked and small island developing States.
- We call on the Permanent Forum to recommend systemic strategies that will deal comprehensively with developing countries' debt problems through national and international measures, such as debt cancellation.
- Strategies should increase access to information and communications technologies.