

INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S PANEL AT THE 1ST SESSION OF UN-PERMANENT FORUM
ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES Monday, MAY 13 2002 NEW YORK, USA.

Tansi: Greetings High Commissioner, Indigenous women, representatives, youth, brothers, and all members and participants of the Permanent Forum:

doCip
ARCHIVES

First of all I would like to extend my gratitude and give honor to the clan mothers of the *Heudenosaunee* and their nation whose traditional territory we are visitors upon.

Our teachings tell us about respect that must be bestowed upon the life-givers of our nations. I would recommend that in all the work that we conduct as Indigenous peoples that we consider the volatile and unique situation that Indigenous women often face in terms of the dual racism and sexism discrimination pressures that the dominant societies have initiated. The identification of these issues that women are confronted with will continue to strengthen and empower Indigenous women.

Indigenous women need continued social and political support both at local and national levels in terms of decision-making. This will strengthen their voices. The governments must formulate national policies that involve, reflect and respect the interests of Indigenous women and that focus upon gender sensitivity. Change must be made to existing national policies that discriminate based on gender. **As these issues that have caused spiritual, mental, physical and emotional pain are eradicated empowerment will happen. Many women now lead the process of healing that is needed and contribute to the restoration of harmony and the holistic health of our societies.**

Personally, my own empowerment has occurred through my own self-development, the gathering and sharing of knowledge, and through my education journey. Education has helped me understand how colonialism and the assimilative tactics and practices of the dominant governments have contributed to the current state of disharmony within our societies. Many of the issues that we are challenged with are the result of colonialism. **However, it is we as a collective of Indigenous women and men, who now hold the responsibility in restoring health to our nations. We both, as Indigenous women and men have a sacred role and responsibility to carry out within this process of decolonization and the strengthening of our people.**

Cultural knowledge has empowered me by helping me understand the responsibilities that we hold as members of our families, people and nations. Traditional practices have grounded me and root me within my cultural ways. Our ceremonies will continue to empower and give direction to our children and those that are yet to come. Our cultural practices will tell our children what it is that they must maintain and protect. My Saulteau name Migizikwe (Eagle woman) offers me protection, guidance and gives meaning to my direction in life. My Nehiyuk Iskew name that my Kokum gave to me was the

name of her mother (my great grandmother) WapigwaknewIskew grounds me by reminding me who I am and where I came from and where it is I am going.

My own empowerment was taught to me by my mother, whose kind, gentle and determined character continues to give me strength and stability. It is my mother who has always maintained a strong sense of cultural pride, which in turn has given me strength to participate in the political, social and cultural struggles that we all face as Indigenous peoples. It is also the strength of my Kokum, who has a strong voice and a dignified character. They have shaped me. My mother and my Kokum have both been role models and teachers of empowerment for me.

Conclusion

We all know that women are the caretakers within a family and they are the givers of life of a people. Indigenous women hold a key role in passing on the language, culture, and traditions of our nations. Women play a significant role in teaching our children about the aspirations of our nations. An Anishnaabe spiritual teacher told me that as Indigenous women we stand in the direction of the eastern doorway. **The eastern direction that represents new life, Patricia Monture-Angus a Heudenosaunee scholar reminds us that without Indigenous men as our counter-parts we are unable to open the doorway to new life. Indigenous men also hold a respectful and sacred role in our relationship with creation. Indigenous women need the support of Indigenous men as their partners. Indigenous men must continue to stand beside women and share in the responsibility of restoring balance in society for Indigenous women.**

Nanasumtiin. My name is Nicole Hetu. I am Saulteau Cree from British Columbia. I humbly thank you for taking your time in listening to these words that I share respectfully.