

**United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues Eleventh Session, 16 – 27 May, 2012
Agenda Item 3 : Report of the expert group meeting: combatting violence against Indigenous women and girls, article 22 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

Report of the Second International Indigenous Women's Environmental and Reproductive Health Symposium, Co-hosted by the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) and Indigenous Women's Initiative for Environmental and Reproductive Health, Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT), Chickaloon Native Village and the International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI), Presented by Andrea Carmen, International Indian Treaty Council

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

From April 27th – 29th 2012, 52 Indigenous Women and girls from North America, Latin America, the Arctic and the Pacific, gathered at the **2nd INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S ENVIRONMENTAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SYMPOSIUM**, held at the Yah Ne Dah Ah Tribal School, Chickaloon Native Village in Alaska. Participants included youth and elders, traditional healers and midwives, tribal leaders, human rights and environmental activists. They shared their stories and the experiences of their communities, and discussed the many interlinking impacts on reproductive health of the proliferation of environmental toxins and contaminants. The full report from this Symposium will be posted on the Permanent Forum website under the 11th session as Conference Room paper. Following are excerpts from the 2nd Declaration for Health, Life and Defense of our Lands, Rights and Future Generations approved by consensus of the participants on April 29th 2012.

We thank the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues for recognizing the 1st International Indigenous Women's Symposium on Environmental and Reproductive Health at its 10th session, and receiving the report of the 2nd Symposium at this session. We also thank the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples James Anaya for visiting the 2nd Symposium in conjunction with his US Country Visit on April 28th, 2012, and for his commitment to include the concerns expressed by participants his report to the UN Human Rights Council.

We express our collective outrage that current federal and international laws permit industry, military and all levels of government to knowingly produce, release, store, transport, export, import and dump hazardous chemicals and radioactive materials, and expand contaminating activities such as fossil fuel development, hydraulic fracturing, uranium mining and milling, introduction of genetically modified seeds and animals, bio-fuel production and high-pesticide agriculture.

We acknowledge the sacredness of the life-giving force of our birthing places. Many are under attack from toxic contamination, extractive industries and other industrial processes. These include salmon spawning, caribou and moose birthing places, as well as women's wombs.

Our health and well-being, lands and resources including air and water, languages, cultures, traditional foods and subsistence, sovereignty and self-determination, life and security of person, free prior and informed consent and the transmission of traditional knowledge and teachings to our future generations are inherent and inalienable human rights. They are affirmed in the UN *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and other international standards, and must be upheld, respected and fully implemented by States, UN bodies, corporations and Indigenous Peoples of the world.

The detrimental health effects of toxic contaminants on Indigenous women are well documented, and are affirmed through testimonies presented in this Symposium. These include high levels of toxics in

Indigenous women's breast milk, placental cord blood, blood serum and body fat infertility, miscarriages, premature births, premature menopause, early menses, reproductive system cancers, decreased lactation and inability to produce healthy children.

Environmental toxins also have severe negative impacts on the health and development of our children and unborn generations. Many toxic chemicals impair the endocrine and immune systems in utero, affecting health and reproductive capacity of future generations. The intellectual and neurological development of our children are also affected, impacting their ability to retain and pass on our culture, ceremonies, stories, languages and songs.

The individual and collective impacts of intergenerational trauma and the legacy of removal and violence are passed on to future generations. Intergenerational trauma amplifies and reinforces impacts of extractive industry, military and environmental degradation in our communities. Addressing intergenerational trauma is a core component of rebuilding reproductive health for our communities.

Environmental contamination infringes on the cultural practices of Indigenous Peoples including women's coming of age, rites of passage and other ceremonies for the continuation of life. Plants, herbs, and traditional medicines vital to Indigenous Peoples' maternal and child health are often outlawed, prohibited, contaminated or are becoming extinct.

Likewise, introduction of extractive industries near our communities often results in increased levels of sexual exploitation and violence for our Indigenous women and girls. We will continue to use our own languages and ways of knowing. Our understandings cannot always be expressed in the language of modern science and law. Our Peoples, especially our traditional knowledge holders, spiritual leaders and elders are the experts.

Environmental contaminants causing disease, birth defects and death are deliberately released into the environment *because* they are toxic to living things (i.e. pesticides), or as a result of industrial or military processes that are judged by States and corporations to pose an "acceptable risk" and "allowable harm." States and corporations deny "provable" impacts despite the clear evidence that they cause a range of serious health and reproductive impacts which disproportionately affect Indigenous women and children. This constitutes "**environmental violence**" by States and corporations and must be identified as such by Indigenous Peoples and human rights bodies.

We firmly denounce the continued impunity of States and corporations for the environmental violence they carry out or permit affecting Indigenous Peoples ecosystems, traditional foods, health, well-being and ways of life. We also affirm the use of our own Indigenous justice and legal systems, including Treaty-Based justice systems to hold those accountable for environmental violence.

Based on these shared affirmations, participants made recommendations to Indigenous Peoples, Nations and Communities; to States and their subsidiary governments; and to the United Nations System and International processes. In keeping with the mandate of the Permanent Forum, we include only the last category of recommendations in this oral summary for the consideration of the Permanent Forum members and inclusion in their report for this session:

- 1) That the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples address reproductive and environmental health, and receive the report of the 3rd symposium to be held in 2014 in the autonomous region of Nicaragua.

- 2) That effective, transparent international mechanisms be established to ensure accountability, redress and restitution with the full participation of affected Indigenous Peoples and for UN Human rights bodies to dedicate particular attention to the matter of environmental violence.
- 3) That the World Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio + 20, 2012) reaffirm the “precautionary approach as an alternative to the models of “risk assessment” and “management” of toxic chemicals and pesticides, and recognize and support sustainable agricultural methods and practices used traditionally by Indigenous Peoples.
- 5) That UN Conventions and national laws which permit the export, transport and import of banned pesticides, wastes and other toxics without the free, prior and informed consent of the Indigenous Peoples and communities who may be impacted be immediately reviewed and revised
- 6) That the United Nations, its agencies and members ensure that Human Rights principles and standards are mainstreamed in all international standard-setting processes addressing environment and development, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- 7) That the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other UN bodies and mechanisms focus attention and collect information from Indigenous Peoples, in particular Indigenous women, on the links between environmental contamination and reproductive health and recommend effective solutions and remedies at the international level.
- 8) Regarding the development of the new legally-binding International Treaty on Mercury, we call for strong language to “*halt emissions of mercury into the environment from all sources, including the burning of coal,*” and “*to ensure the full, formal and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples, including Indigenous women.*” We also recommend that the Permanent Forum at its 11th session call upon States and the UN Environmental Program to incorporate the recognition of Indigenous Peoples and in the operative text of the Treaty.
- 9) Finally, we call upon Indigenous, National and International processes to respect the traditional knowledge of Indigenous women regarding sustainable development, environmental protection, cultural practices, food production and health and to include their full and effective participation as leaders and experts in all levels of decision-making on these matters.

In conclusion, the participants affirmed the following:

We commit to continue our work and fulfill our responsibilities to our children and the generations still to come. We commit to reclaim our wellness as Indigenous women and Peoples. We reaffirm that our children have a right to be born healthy and to live in a clean environment, and that in order to heal our Peoples and Mother Earth, we have to continue to heal ourselves, tell our stories and be who we are. ***“We are like a strong river that rises and falls, is always connected and will never stop flowing.”***

In closing Mr. Chairman, we express our appreciation for the recognition of the devastating the impacts Environmental Violence in the report of the EGM. We look forward to working with the UNPFII in the implementation of these recommendations. We also request that the submission of this report and its recommendations are noted in the report of the 11th session.

Thank you.