

**STATEMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS OF INDIGENOUS  
CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

*Presented by Heather Milton-Lightening, Indigenous Environmental Network/International  
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at the*

High-Level Panel and Dialogue on Indigenous Children and Youth  
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Mr. Chairman;

I bring a concern of the environmental health issues related to our children and youth.

I must bring up the issues concerning the health of our children related to environmental effects.

Specifically I want to address the issues of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and other persistent bioaccumulative toxic substances from the world's environment. These pollutants include toxic substances from industrial processes and production, by-product wastes, mining and extractive industry, military toxics, agricultural chemicals and heavy metals, such as mercury.

The widespread proliferation of these toxic substances in the atmosphere and ecosystems presents a particularly critical threat to Indigenous Peoples, and especially our women and children, with serious and long lasting injury to ecosystems and human health.

We acknowledge data that demonstrates the serious health conditions related to environmental conditions of children worldwide, however, would like to bring out the concern that data on the specific effects of health conditions related to environmental conditions of our children is seriously lacking. Indigenous environmental and some health organizations are starting to find Indigenous children and our communities are experiencing a disproportionate and higher level of exposure to toxic and radioactive contamination.

- o Each year, at least 3 million children under the age of five die due to environmental-related illnesses.

The example of data I just mentioned, involves all children across the world and does not reflect the specific impact upon our Indigenous children are experiencing to environmental related illnesses. It would be safe to say that in some regions, these environmental-related illnesses are multiplied and compounded.

Here in the United States and Canada, scientific studies have found elevated levels of toxic poisons in the breast milk of our mothers. And this is in countries that pride themselves on environmental protection laws and health programs. One could only wonder of the more serious environmental-related illnesses that Indigenous children may experience in developing countries and countries in transition.

Research and assessment tools, from here in the United States and Canada, and globally, do not have adequate indicators and mechanisms that take into account cultural and spiritual values in establishing environmental and health standards, laws, and assessing health impacts.

Mr. Chairman, the right of our future generation to live in a safe and healthy environment is a human right issue, yet in most United Nations meetings, countries are resisting in taking a rights-based approach to addressing these issues. Our Indigenous children are uniquely vulnerable to environmental exposures. Our children must have action from the United Nations to address this serious issue.

We are requesting for the establishment of an *Intergovernmental Panel on Children's Environmental Health*, that has the active participation of Indigenous Peoples, our traditional knowledge holders, and our other experts, from every region, globally, that will assess the effects of environmental exposures and conditions on children's health and the risk of exposure, and a commitment to establish standardized methods of data collection and analysis, data reporting, and public dissemination of information collected

We must be aware that poverty is a major contributor to, and the result of, environmental degradation and human illness. There must be an integrated approach, with the whole UN system, all its agencies, bodies, inter-governmental bodies, countries and most especially our Indigenous communities to address this issue.

There is a need for mechanisms for financial and technological resources from local, national, sub-region, regionally and internationally, in order to build the capacity of Indigenous Peoples to meet and educate themselves on these toxics and environmental health issues;

We must recall that the international community has committed itself to addressing crucial environmental health issues through international treaties and fora such as the Stockholm Convention on POPs, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Thank you.