

ROUNDTABLE 1 — UN SYSTEM ACTION TO IMPLEMENT RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

**JOINT STATEMENT ON
COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN THROUGH UN SYSTEM ACTION**

Thank you, Mr. co-chair. Na sadewa quiyaw awmuu. Yuwehlootsaye navi kii'yeh. I am, Dorma Sahneyah or Yellow Spider, as I am known among my people. I am a Hopi tribal citizen from Northern Arizona where my people, with connections to a culture called "Hisatsinom" (People of Long Ago), have lived since time immemorial.

This statement is on behalf of the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC), a national, non-profit organization dedicated to addressing the safety and sovereignty of Native Women and restoring Native women to their sacred status within tribal nations and communities. Also supporting this statement are 41 indigenous nations and 18 organizations in the United States.

Violence against women and girls is a universal violation of human rights and a form of discrimination that occurs in every country. Especially appalling is the disproportionately high, multiple forms of violence and murder indigenous women suffer not only because they are women, but also because they are members of indigenous communities.

Many find it unimaginable that, in the United States, American Indian and Alaska Native women are two-and-a-half times more likely to be assaulted than other women. One in three American Indian and Alaska Native women will be raped in her lifetime and six in ten will be physically assaulted. On some reservations, the murder rate for Native women is ten times the national average. Alaska Native women suffer some of the highest and most disproportionate rates of domestic and sexual violence in the entire United States.

As Native women, we explicitly recognize the social, historical and political nature of our violent experiences – that we are raped, beaten, go missing and end up murdered simply because we are American Indian or Alaska Native women, and live in Indian country or on Alaska native lands.

Dorma Sahneyah
NIWRC
Hopi Tribe - AZ

Article 22 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is important in its direction that states take measures to protect indigenous women against violence and discrimination. Many human rights treaties support the right of women to live free from violence; to life, liberty, and security of the person; and to equal protection under the law. Many in the world can take these rights for granted; indigenous women and girls cannot.

United Nations action is necessary to uphold the rights in the Declaration that protect indigenous women and children against violence and discrimination. We urge the UN to support strong actions at this World Conference — including: (i) convening a high-level conference to examine challenges to the safety of indigenous women and children; (ii) requiring that a UN body for implementing the Declaration give this issue particular attention; and (iii) appointing a Special Rapporteur to focus on the human rights issues of indigenous women and children.

We truly appreciate the work of states and indigenous peoples in working to negotiate a strong, action-oriented outcome document for this World Conference. This is no small task. While we appreciate these efforts greatly, much more can and simply must be done to effect real and lasting changes to improve the lives and safety of indigenous women. We urge continued efforts by the world community to restore safety and honor to indigenous women. Thank you.

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**JOINT STATEMENT ON
COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN THROUGH UN SYSTEM ACTION**

This joint statement is offered on behalf of 41 supporting indigenous nations and 18 organizations in the United States.*

Violence against women and girls is a pervasive violation of human rights and a form of discrimination that persists in every country. Even more dire is the epidemic of violence being inflicted on indigenous women. Indigenous women suffer disproportionately high, multiple forms of discrimination, violence, and murder not only because they are women, but also because they are indigenous and members of indigenous communities.¹

In the United States, for example, despite recent reforms, discriminatory laws continue to perpetuate a cycle of violence that affects American Indian and particularly Alaska Native women more than others, just because they are indigenous and are assaulted in Indian country or on Alaska Native lands. Many find it unimaginable that, in the United States, American Indian and Alaska Native women are two-and-a-half times more likely to be assaulted and more than twice as likely to be stalked as other women. One in three American Indian and Alaska Native women will be raped in her lifetime, and six in ten will be physically assaulted. On some reservations, the murder rate for Native women is ten times the national average. Alaska Native women endure some of the highest and most disproportionate rates of domestic and sexual violence in the entire United States. Elsewhere in the world, the situation for indigenous women may be even more urgent.

There is now world-wide support among states for the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which affirms the rights and special needs of indigenous women and children. Article 22 is particularly significant, directing states, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, to take measures to protect indigenous women against violence and discrimination.

Many human rights treaties have provisions supporting the right of women to live free from violence, including the rights to life, liberty, and security of the person; to be free from torture; and to equal protection under the law. Many in the world can take these rights for granted; indigenous women and girls cannot. They are targeted for multiple forms of violence

¹ *Study on the extent of violence against indigenous women and girls in terms of article 22 (2) of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, E/C.19/2013/9 (Feb. 2013).

— intimate partner violence, sexual violence, custodial violence by police, human trafficking, and murder — at disproportionately and shockingly higher rates than other women.

Action by the UN is crucial to uphold the rights in the Declaration, including those protecting indigenous women and children against violence and discrimination.

Firm, concrete actions by both the UN and states, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, are absolutely critical if safety is to be restored to indigenous women worldwide. Toward that end, at least 136 indigenous nations and 23 organizations have joined us in urging the UN to support strong actions at this World Conference — actions consistent with the rights of indigenous women affirmed in the Declaration such as: (i) convening a high-level conference to examine challenges to the safety of indigenous women and children; (ii) requiring that a UN body for implementing the Declaration give this issue particular attention; and (iii) appointing a Special Rapporteur to focus on the human rights issues of indigenous women and children.

We commend the efforts of states and indigenous peoples in working to negotiate a strong, action-oriented outcome document for this World Conference. This no small task. While we appreciate these efforts greatly, much more can and simply must be done to effect real and lasting changes to improve the lives and safety of indigenous women.

* The supporting indigenous nations and organizations include:

Akiak Native Community; Alliance of Tribal Coalitions to End Violence; California Association of Tribal Governments (Big Lagoon Rancheria; Big Pine Reservation; Big Sandy Rancheria; Cahuilla Band of Mission Indians of the Cahuilla Reservation; California Valley Miwok Tribe; Cher-Ae Heights Indian Community of the Trinidad Rancheria; Cloverdale Rancheria; Enterprise Rancheria of Maidu Indians of California; Ewiiapaayp Band of Kumeyaay Indians; Greenville Rancheria of Maidu Indians of California; Habematolet Pomo of Upper Lake; Hoopa Valley Tribe; Hopland Band of Pomo Indians of the Hopland Rancheria; Ione Band of Miwok Indians of California; Jamul Indian Village; Karuk Tribe of California; Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria; Los Coyotes Band of Cahuilla and Cupeño Indians; Mesa Grande Band of Kumeyaay Indians; Morongo Band of Mission Indians; Northfork Rancheria of Mono Indians of California; Pit River Tribe; Ramona Band of Cahuilla Indians; Resighini Rancheria; Scotts Valley Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians of California; Smith River Rancheria; Soboba Band of Luiseno Indians; Susanville Indian Rancheria; Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation, Central District; Wiyot Tribe; Yurok Tribe of the Yurok Reservation, Southern District); Cherokee Nation; Citizen Potawatomi Nation; Clan Star, Inc.; Emmonak Women's Shelter; Ewiiapaayp Band of Kumeyaay Indians; First Nations Women's Alliance; Hopi Tewa Women's Coalition to End Abuse; Indian Law Resource Center; Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe; Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe; Minnesota Indian Women's Sexual Assault Coalition; Montana Native Women's Coalition; National Congress of American Indians; National Indigenous Women's Resource Center; Native Alliance Against Violence; Native Women's Society of the Great Plains; Quapaw Nation; Southwest Indigenous Women's Coalition; Strong Hearted Native Women's Coalition; Uniting Three Fires Against Violence; Village of Anvik; Village of Emmonak; Village of Tetlin; Washington State Native American Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault – WomenSpirit Coalition; Yupiit Nation; and the Yup'ik Women's Coalition.