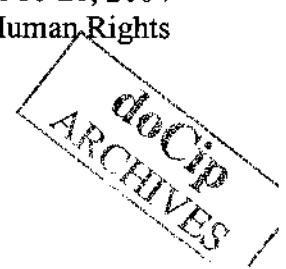


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Permanent Forum in Indigenous Issues
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Agenda item 4(d): Human Rights

Intervention of the Innu Council of Nitassinan
May 17, 2004



M. le Président et Membres de l'Instance permanente,

Nous vous félicitons du choix et de la grande place accordés aux femmes autochtones lors de cette 3e session. N'oublions pas qu'elles représentent **plus de la moitié** de la population autochtone dans ce monde. Nous n'avons qu'un souhait, c'est qu'elles soient en aussi grand nombre lors des prochaines rencontres de l'Instance permanente.

Nous avons choisi de répondre à une des trois questions lancées par le gouvernement du Canada lors de son intervention sur le Panel sur les femmes autochtones. Ces questions s'inscrivent bien au sein de la thématique des droits de la personne. Nous faisons cette démarche par souci de dialoguer et de reconnaître l'apport non seulement des membres de l'Instance permanente, mais d'autres organisations autochtones et d'autres États.

M. le Président, nos réponses aux questions du Canada sont aussi nos recommandations à l'Instance permanente:

1. *Le Canada propose de se questionner sur les façons de comprendre et de faciliter les efforts des femmes autochtones en tant que leaders dans un monde en profonde transformation.*

- D'abord, il faudrait reconnaître **toutes** ces leaders femmes autochtones. Notons que le gouvernement fédéral canadien n'a pas encore reconnu l'organisation Pauktuutit, qui représente les femmes inuit du Canada.
- Ensuite, il faudrait respecter la **liberté d'opinion** et rendre inconditionnels aux choix politiques les fonds et subventions versés aux organisations autochtones. Au Canada, dans les années 1990, le gouvernement fédéral a coupé les fonds et les subventions aux groupes de femmes autochtones qui se sont positionnées contre le gouvernement fédéral lors d'un référendum national. Il a fait de même avec des organisations autochtones de femmes et d'hommes au début des années 2000 parce que ces derniers ne voulaient pas accepter de se soumettre à un projet de loi sur la gouvernance autochtone.
- Finally, governments should stop using the strategy "**divide to reign**". REPEAT For example, Canada has seen a multiplication of conflicts within Indigenous groups over the exercise of democratic power, including conflicts over cultural membership for women. In addition, tribal governments lack resources and power, and may abuse the power they have. As a consequence, their own legitimacy is constantly questioned by insiders (such as women) and outsiders (such as the Canadian government, on the

grounds of protecting indigenous women). Such questioning on the part of Indigenous women – who call not only for participation in the business of Indigenous political and cultural groups-collectivities, but also in the democratic decision-making processes – should be taken seriously. Non-Indigenous governments perceive these demands as feminist in character and Indigenous governments, have characterized them as ‘infected’ by the ‘other’ – western feminism and so as ‘secondary interests’ or as simply illegitimate. In this ways, Indigenous women’s political opposition and their calls for democracy, for human rights and for their individual rights are discredited. Let us remind you that the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women with Reference to indigenous Women for 2003 concluded that the government of Canada still does not address remaining discriminatory legal provisions under Acts, including matrimonial property rights, status and band membership questions which are incompatible with the Convention.

- On a **theoretical basis** because gender is not only a descriptive category or another way of designating ‘woman’, but another tool with which to analyse the different relationships that produce those groups, translating gender for Indigenous peoples prompts a difficult process of continual negotiation around the terms “women”, “gender” and “feminism”. We believe that separate accounts of diverse indigenous experiences can be read in conversation with one another. We use gender as a category of analysis that deals with the antagonistic relationships that produce these groups.
We urge the permanent Forum to take into consideration the need of more studies on the intertwining of gender, indigenous peoples and their right to self-determination.

On a general stand:

- We also recommend to act rapidly on the Declaration of the International Indigenous Women's Forum which is supportive of the UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- We urge the Permanent Forum to look at original ways to define self-determination. Concretely, this situation demands to shift from an end-state’ approach to a relational approach to self-determination’. Indigenous peoples’ movements are a source of ideas and actions beyond the system of nation-states and show the limits of a political strategy based on a defunct international imperial order