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Intervention by:  
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Mr. Chairperson, Fellow Members of the Forum, Ladies & Gentlemen

It' is an honour to be among the highly minoritized presence, of men, when discussing the issue of the rights of women, particularly indigenous women. I had the rare honour, last year, to participate in a side event co-organized by UN Women and FIMI, on the subject.

I wish to discuss two issues, namely, (a) the promotion of the rights of indigenous women in leadership positions; and (b) the issue of rape and sexual and other violence against indigenous women.

**Women in leadership Roles**

With regard to the role of indigenous women in leadership positions, whilst the state remains among the most important duty-bearers, to take the issue forward, the role of indigenous peoples and their communities, is no less important.

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts region in Bangladesh, where I am a traditional chief, we are dealing with the matter of promoting indigenous women in leadership roles, including as traditional village chiefs and heads. We face several obstacles in this regard, including so-called traditions that are regarded to be part of age-old customs, practices and usages. A closer scrutiny, however, often demonstrates that these so-called age-old traditions are in fact not so old, nor an integral part of our customs.

When we deal with the issue of customary law and traditional indigenous institutions, we need to bear in mind that although such laws and institutions are duly regarded in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, there is a clear proviso, or condition, in that such customs and practices must be in accordance with international human rights standards. Where there is conflict between these standards and the law or custom concerned, the international standard must prevail, to prevent discrimination against indigenous women.

**Rape & Other Violence against Women**

As in so many other parts of the world, the problem of rape and sexual and other forms of violence against women is acute in my home region of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. Effective measures are needed to be taken by both the state *and* by the people or community concerned to deal with the issue.

In the case of deterrent measures and prosecution and punishment to the perpetrators, the primary duty lies with the state, to take appropriate measures. For example, has it been ensured that there are sufficient women police, including indigenous women, to undertake protective measures and to prosecute and punish? Have steps been taken to ensure that the necessary evidence is collected? Are indigenous women adequately protected by the police? And so forth.

However, the indigenous peoples and their communities also have a role to play, particularly where the victims of violence are likely to be unjustly stigmatized, or ostracized. The communities' role is also important to take preventive and rehabilitative measures in cases of sexual violence.

Many of these problems are complex and require coordinated measures, by all actors concerned, to deal with the issue. Some of these issues have been addressed at international meetings but more needs to be done. And in this the Permanent Forum needs to continue its role, in a stronger way, as this is a very vital issue that concerns us all.

Thank you.