

FOURTH CONFERENCE OF THE ASIA INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S NETWORK
Prince Palace Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand
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INDIGENOUS WOMEN MATTER: RESILIENCE, GOVERNANCE AND
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

As governments and the private sector draw development in boardrooms, indigenous peoples' sweat and blood continue to spill over lands and territories over which the boardroom drawings are superimposed. The alarming global trend of criminalizing indigenous peoples' rights defenders, while temporarily debilitating, is otherwise an indicator of the growing strength of indigenous peoples' movement in defense of the right to a life with dignity founded on their ancestral lands and territories. Indigenous women have not been spared but they are not cowering. Against various odds and forms of aggression, including gender violence, indigenous women continue to harness their knowledge and practice to strengthen and inspire each other to ensure a better world for the next generation.

"We, the women of the original peoples of the world have struggled actively to defend our rights to self-determination and to our territories which have been invaded and colonized by powerful nations and interests. We have been and are continuing to suffer from multiple oppressions; as Indigenous peoples, as citizens of colonized and neo-colonial countries, as women, and as members of the poorer classes of society. In spite of this, we have been and continue to protect, transmit, and develop our Indigenous cosmovision, our science and technologies, our arts and culture, and our Indigenous socio-political economic systems, which are in harmony with the natural laws of mother earth. We still retain the ethical and esthetic values, the knowledge and philosophy, the spirituality, which conserves and nurtures Mother Earth. We are persisting in our struggles for self-determination and for our rights to our territories. This has been shown in our tenacity and capacity to withstand and survive the colonization happening in our lands in the last 500 years."¹ This is part of the declaration of indigenous women from all corners

¹ Beijing Indigenous Women's Declaration during the 4th World Conference on Women, 1995.

of the world who gathered in Beijing in 1995 during the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Due to relentless advocacy and lobby of indigenous peoples, Agenda 21, the plan of action to address environmental degradation for sustainable development adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, 1992) recognized indigenous peoples' holistic concept of land and their significant roles in sustainable development, and called for "national and international efforts to implement environmentally sound and sustainable development should recognize, accommodate, promote and strengthen the role of indigenous people and their communities."² This recognition of the link between environment issues to human rights, has become a leverage in indigenous peoples' advancement into the discussions and agreements under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Framework Convention on Climate Change, among others, which were similarly borne out of the UNCED.

In 2000, states committed to the United Nations Millennium Declaration, eventually known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to address extreme poverty. From different processes at different levels, indigenous peoples have come to a common assessment that the MDGs failed "to recognize indigenous peoples as distinct groups under the MDGs, resulting in the absence of targeted measures to address their specific situations related to poverty and severely limited the realization of favourable outcomes. Furthermore, culturally blind implementation of the MDGs resulted in inappropriate development programmes for indigenous peoples including discriminatory actions related to education, health and basic services."³

In the same year, the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Peace, Women and Security was adopted. The situation of indigenous women in conflict-ridden areas, however, is not getting any better as conflicts are galvanized to persecute, criminalize and attack indigenous communities with impunity and kill leaders and activists defending their rights. Reports from 2014 point to escalating targeted violence and repression of indigenous activists globally. From documented cases at a global level, the Philippines and India

² Chapter 26.1. Agenda 21, 1992.

³ https://unngls.org/images/PDF/INDIGENOUS_PEOPLES_MAJOR_GROUP_Policy_Brief.pdf

ranked 3rd and 4th, respectively, as the most dangerous countries for indigenous environmental and human rights defenders in 2016.

Global Witness, in its documentation, reveal that 40% of human rights defenders killed in 2014 are indigenous men, women and youth. In 2015, the Frontline Defenders documented 156 killings worldwide, some 45% of which, are related to indigenous peoples' rights.⁴ In 2016, 281 were reportedly killed in 25 countries. "A lack of prosecutions also makes it hard to identify those responsible, but we found strong evidence that the police and military were behind at least 43 killings, with private actors such as security guards and hitmen linked to 52 deaths."⁵ Criminalization of indigenous activists, according to the UNSRIP Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, has reached a crisis proportion.

On top of these, gender violence from discrimination to rape, including human and labor trafficking among indigenous women continues unabated. Latest research by indigenous organizations documented 56 cases of sexual and physical assault, mostly children and youth in 2017 alone. The 75 alleged perpetrators are mostly non-indigenous. Many cases remain unreported due to threats of further violence by offenders⁶ and the general lack of protection for indigenous women and peoples in the country.

In India, a conservative figure of 2,500 Indians have been chased, tortured and killed in witch hunts from 2000-2016. Witch hunts, according to a study reviewed by the Scientific American, "primarily target women and exploit India's caste system and culture of patriarchy. Men who brand women as *dakan* capitalize on deeply rooted superstitions and systems built on misogyny and patriarchy to lay blame on females. The accusations of sorcery are used to oust women from valuable land that men covet, in a region where flawed development plans have produced agricultural failures, say sociologists who study violence in India. Witches are also convenient explanations for rising infant mortality rates and deaths from malaria, typhoid and cholera".⁷

⁴ <https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2016/Threats-and-attacks-on-indigenous-peoples-rights-activists.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.awid.org/publications/defenders-earth>

⁶ <https://www.awid.org/publications/defenders-earth>

⁷ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/witch-hunts-today-abuse-of-women-superstition-and-murder-collide-in-india>

In 2015, the MDGs were replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁸. Otherwise referred to as Agenda 2030, states are currently occupied with its operationalization at the country level. Noting the failure of the MDGs to address indigenous peoples, and specifically, indigenous women, indigenous peoples posit that “If the world community truly aspires to leave no one behind, it is critical that these gaps be recognized and addressed moving forward. UN Member states and the UN system must fulfill their previous commitments to Indigenous Peoples whose needs must be centrally situated within the SDGs and the Post:2015 Development Agenda⁹”.

It has been 23 years now since Beijing and indigenous women’s multiple oppression persist despite international commitments to women and indigenous peoples including Agenda 21¹⁰, the Millennium Development Goals and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) adopted in 2007. In the rally to the Post-2015 development agenda, indigenous women representatives gathered in the World Conference of Indigenous Women and strongly stood on the principle of “nothing about us without us” and further declared “everything about us, with us”!¹¹

Agenda 2030 has 17 goals, 169 targets with 230 indicators that hope to ensure the health of people, planet and prosperity. It includes a specific Goal (Goal 5) for the empowerment of women and girls to achieve gender equality. Other goals particularly relevant to indigenous women and their communities, as a whole, and interlinked with each other are Goal 1 on ending poverty, ending hunger (Goal 2), conservation of forest and biodiversity (Goal 15) and achieving Peace and Strong Institutions (Goal 16) amongst others.

As we welcome the progress in the recognition of women’s equal rights to economic resources, complex challenges remain. In many cases, indigenous women face loss of ancestral lands and natural resources, which leads to

⁸ “[Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)” including its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets was adopted on 25 September 2015 by Heads of State and Government at a special UN summit. The Agenda is a commitment to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development by 2030 world-wide, ensuring that no one is left behind.” (http://ec.europa.eu/environment/sustainable-development/SDGs/index_en.htm)

⁹ https://unngls.org/images/PDF/INDIGENOUS_PEOPLES_MAJOR_GROUP_Policy_Brief.pdf

¹⁰ Agenda 21 is a comprehensive plan of action to be taken at all levels in every area in which human impacts on the environment. This was adopted by more than 178 governments during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on 3-14 June 1992. The same conference adopted the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the Statement of Principle for the Sustainable Management of Forests.

¹¹ Lima Declaration of the World Conference of Indigenous Women, 28-30 October 2013, Lima, Peru.

economic insecurity, and challenges the rights to traditional livelihoods, cultural identity and development. This structural injustice keeps indigenous women impoverished, dependent and in vulnerable conditions.¹² To achieve sustainable development without “leaving no one behind” the Agenda 2030 have to address this structural injustice!

The Fourth Conference of the Asia Indigenous Women’s Network envisions to gather some 60 indigenous women leaders and representatives from the different countries in Asia to celebrate indigenous women’s initiatives to transcend the challenges resulting from historical discrimination in various levels. This includes experiences in the areas of gender discrimination and violence, food security, lands, territories and resources and governance among others. With the theme: INDIGENOUS WOMEN MATTER: RESILIENCE, GOVERNANCE and SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT the conference hopes to highlight the success stories and victories of indigenous women in the region in addressing their situation and its significance in the attainment of sustainable development. The conference was held on October 6-8, 2018 at the Prince Palace Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand.

Objectives:

- a) To exchange information on the indigenous women’s situations, experiences and best practices in dealing with the challenges of their situations in the context of sustainable development. (Add roles in monitoring)
- b) Provide information on recent developments at the international/regional level relevant to the advancement of the status of indigenous women in Asia (including as input into the UNSR’s next thematic report on governance.
- c) Develop a strategic plan of action for indigenous women in the region including active engagement and monitoring of the progress in the respect, protection and fulfillment of indigenous women’s rights I the context of the SDG implementation at the country level.

¹² <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/03/CSW62-CN-March-15.pdf>