



Secretariat: Gender Desk, Tebtebba (Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education)  
No. 1 Roman Ayson Road, Baguio City, 2600 Philippines  
Tel. No. +63 074 444 7703; Fax No. +63 074 443 9459; Website: [www.asianindigenouswomen.org](http://www.asianindigenouswomen.org)

Indigenous Women Matter:  
Resilience, Governance and Sustainable Development  
Declaration of the 4<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Asia Indigenous Women's Network  
Bangkok, Thailand, 6-8 October 2018.

**WE ARE INDIGENOUS WOMEN.**

Kankanaey-Igorot, Boro, Lisu, Karen, Kachin, Chin, Mandaya, Mansaka, Dumagat, Tripura, Papora, Marma, Rakhain, Bunong, Shan, Mon, Kreung, Sumi, Naga, Oraon, Kharia, Minahasa, Taluk, Dayak, Krio, Kanayatn, Semoa Beri, Hmong, Semai, Iban, Dusun Kimaragang, Thakali, Lhomi, Thanu, Newar, Gurung, Tai, Pinuyumayan, Munda, Kalinga and Kalimantan women from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Cambodia, Thailand, Lao PDR, Vietnam, Burma, Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan and the Philippines.

We have gathered at the Prince Palace Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand on October 6-8, 2018 for the 4<sup>th</sup> Asia Indigenous Women's Network with the theme *Indigenous Women Matter: Resilience, Governance and Sustainable Development*, and affirm the Lima Declaration of the World Conference of Indigenous Women.

We hereby "assert our right to self-determination, which encompasses the direct, full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples and the vital role of Indigenous women in all matters related to our human rights, political status, and well-being."

In the the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there should be nothing about us, without us!

*Agenda 21 to Agenda 2030: Continuing impacts of historical discrimination*

It has been 23 years since the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women in Beijing where indigenous women from all over the globe met for the first time to share their

situation, unite on analyses and build solidarity for support and action. The multiple oppression and multidimensional discrimination identified as shared experience among these women still persist until this day despite international commitments for the respect, protection and fulfilment of women and indigenous peoples' rights, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) adopted in 2007, Agenda 21 and the Millennium Development Goals, and now the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

We acknowledge the progress in the recognition of indigenous peoples' rights and women's equal rights and the succeeding initiatives of transformative partnership with indigenous peoples. However, complex challenges remain as economic interests and power prevail over saving the planet for the future generation. Most Asian countries have adopted the UNDRIP, but a lot of work have yet to be done to make this a reality at the national level, including repealing contradictory laws especially those relating to indigenous peoples' lands and self-determination. In the meantime, despite international commitments to combat the climate crisis, it is business as usual in Asia where the remaining robust resources in indigenous territories are targeted by extractive industries, tourism, hydropower dams, industrial and agricultural corporations, including conservation initiatives.

### **THIS IS OUR SITUATION.**

Twenty-three years since Beijing, indigenous women and their communities all over the region are still challenging the increasing loss of the most vital element of their security and well-being - our ancestral lands and resources. The grave violation of human and collective rights of indigenous peoples, including multifaceted gender violence today, speaks of the general lack of political will among states to effectively address the plight of indigenous peoples.

#### *Criminalization of Indigenous human rights defenders*

There is an alarming increase in criminalization and extrajudicial killings of indigenous peoples' human rights defenders protecting indigenous territories and resources from further extraction and exploitation. Forty percent (40%) of those murdered in 2016 are indigenous peoples. While this number went down to 25% by 2017, this still represent a disproportionate number, considering they compose only 5% of the global population. While the proportion of indigenous women to men is 1 woman to nine males globally, they suffer from continuing gender-specific threats like sexual violence, threats to the well-being of their children and targeted smear campaigns as terrorists, among others. With Philippines ranking as the 2<sup>nd</sup> most dangerous country in the world and the most dangerous in Asia, with India, Pakistan and Myanmar in the list, Asia is second to Latin America as the most dangerous regions for human and indigenous rights

activists.[1] Militarization of indigenous communities continue unabated resulting to utter disruption including children's education and the weakening of indigenous socio-political, economic systems impacting heavily on the collective dynamics of indigenous peoples.[2] In some areas, this is almost tantamount to ethnocide.

Criminalization extends to our indigenous livelihoods and food systems[3], not to mention that most are already in states of plunder and degradation from toxic industrial and agricultural waste and extreme climate conditions. More than hunger and poverty, our over-all well-being is threatened from all angles, even within the confines of the territories that has once secured our ancestors.

### *Violence against indigenous women and girls*

Violence against indigenous women remains unabated. Physical, sexual and psychological assault on indigenous women, including witch-hunting, trafficking and bonded labor, characterize concerted efforts to stifle growing indigenous women's rights advances and their communities' assertion of collective rights to self-determination. A significant part of the onslaught against indigenous women, both as individuals and as indigenous peoples, come from state laws, policies and programs, and in many cases, the bureaucracy. The Thomson Reuters Foundation survey puts India as the most dangerous place for women based on incidence of "sexual violence and harassment, cultural and traditional practices and from human trafficking including forced labour, sex slavery and domestic servitude." Myanmar comes in third in the ranking. [4]

Sadly, in some indigenous communities where patriarchy and feudalism are strong and with high incidence and persistence of poverty, indigenous women can also be under attack within the family and society, such as witch-hunting[5] in South Asia and bride kidnaps[6] in Southeast Asia. The region remains to be a popular labor, sex and organ trafficking hub. In India alone, more than three fourths of tribal women from 3 states are in major cities working as domestic helpers. Closely related to labor migration is trafficking. Alarm has been raised about bride trafficking among indigenous communities in Southeast Asia and India. In one indigenous community in Nepal, there is, reportedly, at least one member in every household who exchanged a kidney for much needed cash.

Indigenous peoples' poverty is further exacerbated by the alienation of our sources for subsistence in favor of state priorities and corporate agenda in the name of development or governance. In the CHT of Bangladesh, demographic engineering continues to be the root cause of violent conflicts and where women-targeted crimes have been alarming. In India, the same phenomenon has numerically minoritized the indigenous peoples in their own territory impacting on their access to basic services, programs and indigenous self-governance. In this situation of deprivation and marginalization, indigenous women are forced to seek better

opportunities outside their communities, most often, leaving children in the care of parents or relatives.

### *Impacts from development initiatives and access to justice*

The interlinkages of conflict and development-induced displacement is very pronounced in Asia.

The impacts of the climate crises escalate human pressure and competition for resources predisposing indigenous women and children to disproportionate risks. The montane erosion caused by Typhoon Mangkhut in the Philippines, claiming around 80 indigenous victims, is directly related to the local history of corporate mining in the area.

Indonesia has had its series of incidents from volcanic eruptions and earthquakes to the latest tsunami in Central Sulawesi. While retrieval and relief work is ongoing, concerns have been raised about the equally affected indigenous communities who have been isolated and are being left out of the post disaster work. In both sudden and slow-onset disasters emergency, relief and rehabilitation responses detracts and obscures underlying matters of human rights and accountability including the particular strategic needs of indigenous women, girls and those with disabilities.

Access to justice and basic social services is very limited and attacks the dignity of indigenous women. The justice system is usually geographically and financially inaccessible, alienating in language, format and process, and culturally and gender insensitive, thus, demoralizing for indigenous women. Aside from these, corruption in law enforcement prevails tolerating tampering of medico-legal reports. Up to now, many indigenous women do not enjoy their right to a nationality which deprives them access to basic services.

Lack of full and effective recognition, protection and fulfillment of individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples is counterproductive to the global targets of sustainable development and gender empowerment. It induces intercommunity/intra-people conflict, food instability, landlessness and general human insecurity. It keeps indigenous women impoverished, dependent and in vulnerable conditions, and unable to fully enjoy all their rights as women and indigenous peoples. In the spirit of the 2030 Agenda's "leaving no one behind," structural injustice must be addressed by all actors at all levels.

## **WE ARE STEWARDS OF LIFE. WE MATTER.**

We, Indigenous Women in Asia, stand firm in our resolve to fulfill our roles as stewards of life – our lives rooted in the legacy of our identities and territories nurtured by our ancestors and the lives of the future generation. Building on our

knowledge and experiences and harnessing resources, means and strategies, we are addressing these intersecting challenges resulting from our history of discrimination in various forms and levels amid the market-oriented, business-as-usual development trend and worsening situation of our rights as women and as indigenous peoples. We are working towards the realization of indigenous peoples' sustainable, self-determined development:

- Indigenous women in Thailand have been enabling themselves to claim their citizenship and advance participation in decision making spaces in the formal and traditional spaces while addressing discrimination of women in the traditional context.
- Despite the volatile situation of indigenous peoples and the relentless and unconscionable incidences of violence against indigenous women in Bangladesh, indigenous women in the Chittagong Hilltracts of Bangladesh are addressing their marginalization as women in traditional governance systems without invalidating the latter. To date, there are reportedly 385 women karbaris (village heads) out of more than 870. While challenges from the personal to the broader social level persist, these women, organizing themselves as a network, are slowly influencing the advancement of the status of indigenous women as they drive their communities to gender empowerment.
- The conflict-affected indigenous women in Burma are working on transformative justice and enhancing participation in local governance;
- Indigenous women in Indonesia are mapping their spaces and asserting customary forests and participation in matters affecting them, while challenging the impacts of oil palm plantation and lobbying for the passage of a bill recognizing indigenous peoples' rights in the country;
- Indigenous women in Lao PDR are working in various ways to empower young women to address discrimination in their communities and in the wider society. These include targeted trainings, i.e., lifeskills and support for indigenous youth migrating to the urban centers for education, and support for the livelihoods of indigenous women in their communities.
- Indigenous women in Nepal are consistently lobbying for their representation and participation, including those of indigenous women with disabilities, from local to international level;
- Indigenous women in Vietnam are using legal platforms to advance their status through the promotion of indigenous knowledge, food systems and transmission of culture;

- Similarly, indigenous women in Taiwan are using the recent law recognizing indigenous peoples in Taiwan to strengthen their ranks while working towards further recognition of other indigenous peoples' groups not included in the said law;
- Indigenous women in Cambodia are organizing themselves to strengthen their ranks in the campaign against economic land concessions and gender violence;
- Indigenous women in Malaysia continue to strengthen indigenous women and their community's capacities to assert and protect their rights to their lands and territories;
- Indigenous women in India continue to respond to gender discrimination and violence against indigenous women and girls while asserting rights to land and territories, despite various kinds of challenges faced from within and outside their communities.
- In the Philippines, indigenous women continue to build the resilience of their organizations and communities through community organizing, mobilizing to establish indigenous community schools, and ensuring food security using indigenous knowledge and practices. Indigenous women, at different levels and spaces, continue to engage in the campaign against militarization and corporate interests in indigenous territories.

## **OUR RECOMMENDATIONS.**

We have a voice. We have been governing ourselves since time immemorial. We know what is good and what is bad for us and that has to be acknowledged! States, development actors and agencies should:

1. Address structural barriers to indigenous peoples and gender - responsive development by effectively implementing state commitments to indigenous peoples and women. There is a need for stronger political will among nation-states to curb resource extraction, land and water expropriation, megahydropower dams and rethink conservation<sup>[7]</sup>, tourism, among others.

This should include:

- o Suspension of all initiatives and programs without genuine consent from indigenous peoples concerned or otherwise resulting to plunder of their territories and exploitation of human resources including trafficking among indigenous women and youth;

- o Repeal existing policies contrary to the UNDRIP and the CEDAW and effectively integrate these instruments in national program implementation, specifically, Agenda 2030, in consultation and partnership with indigenous peoples noting the need to leverage spaces to engage indigenous women. The need for disaggregated data based on sex and ethnicity is crucial to this end.
- 2. Institutionalize special measures to address the intersectionalities of discrimination, specially land rights for indigenous women within the scope and protection of indigenous peoples' collective lands.
- 3. Support initiatives to respond to the need for development strategies that respect collective rights, ensure environmental, social, cultural and the spiritual integrity of indigenous peoples while affirming their capacities to decide and implement their sustainable, self-determined development.
  - o Access to financial and technical support should be empowering, not dehumanizing. Development actors should facilitate direct linkages of indigenous women to financial and technical support agencies.
  - o Resources should also be targeted to leverage the position of indigenous women to enable effective participation.

### **OUR COMMITMENT.**

We, indigenous women in Asia, working together as a loose network with a common vision for the advancement of our status as women and as indigenous peoples and the overall gender empowerment of our own communities and the wider public, commit to harness and unleash our power and potentials to sustain our visions of development. We shall:

- 1) Strengthen our organizations and agencies in the advancement of our status and realization of rights as women within and outside our own communities. We will keep working for the enhancement of our institutional capacities and linkages at different spaces and levels. This includes strengthening capacities to generate, document and monitor data not only to ensure our visibility but more importantly in support of our advocacy and campaigns for data disaggregation and accounting for our contribution to sustainable development. We further commit to continue monitoring and reporting violations of our individual and collective rights through our community monitoring efforts and participatory mapping and resource inventory.

2) Arrest the erosion of our indigenous knowledge, language and practice through continuing exercise while ensuring transmission to the our children and youth, in support of the integrity of our indigenous territories which has sustained our families and communities through generations.

4. Sustain and strengthen our engagement at different levels and in different platforms to ensure the integration of indigenous knowledge and practices including respect for our spirituality and well-being without further violating our rights.

3) Broaden solidarity to address discriminatory customs and practices within our own indigenous communities. We shall continue engaging our traditional and state systems to ensure gender-responsive processes to address violence against indigenous women and girls, climate and disaster actions, access to basic services and justice.

---

[1] <https://www.eco-business.com/news/the-philippines-asias-most-dangerous-country-for-environmental-defenders/>

[2] Targetting of indigenous women activists in the Philippines has escalated since 2012 Indigenous peoples managed community schools have been targeted in counter insurgency campaigns by Philippine government since 2012.

[3] In relation to the enlistment of Kaeng Krachen National Park as a world heritage park, the Karen have experienced forced evictions, destruction of housing and crops, arrests and enforced disappearances since 2010.

[4] <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/10-most-dangerous-countries-in-the-world-for-women-1.6217212>.

[5] In India, 2,290 alleged witches were killed from 2000- 2016, most of which were poor, illiterate, old, widow and single. Aside from superstition, witch crimes have also reportedly been linked to disputes over land and property of women.

[6] "In Myanmar's borders with China and Thailand, of 133 verified and suspected cases of trafficking involving 163 women and girls from Kachin and Northern Shan State documented in 2004-2007, 90 in the confirmed cases were sold to men in



other countries as forced brides; 94% of them were sent to China" (<https://aippnet.org/indigenous-women-and-human-trafficking-in-the-mekong-region-policy-overview-and-community-response/>).

[7] India's Forest Rights Act 2006 failed to prevent the displacement of Adivasis from their forests homes nor ensure reparations, in favor of wild animal reserves for decades. "...protected areas have already displaced some 600 000 tribal people and forest dwellers and affected many more. Yet, the Ministry of Environment and Forests plans to establish a further 650 wildlife sanctuaries and 150 national parks in the next few years, displacing as many people again" (PRIA, 1993).- <http://www.fao.org/docrep/w1033e/w1033e08.htm>