

"Bringing Indigenous Perspectives to the International Arena: An Indigenous Women's Conference"

International Indigenous Women's Forum Declaration

We, the women of the International Indigenous Women's Forum, have come together in New York on February 26 and 27 and March 12, 2005, for a three-day conference beginning just prior to the 49th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, in which we will take part. Our purpose in gathering is to strengthen our skills, strategies and advocacy work on behalf of ourselves, our Peoples, our communities and Women's human rights globally.

We note that there have been qualitative and quantitative advances, but today, 10 years after the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing; half-way through the decade devoted to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, Indigenous Women continue to face a crisis stemming from: unbridled and escalating militarism, gender-based violence which includes rape and trafficking of women within our own communities and as a tactic of armed conflicts; and macro-economic policies that disregard collective rights and deny us our livelihoods and basic services, including safe potable water, health care and culturally appropriate education and institutions.

We call on our governments to reaffirm and fully implement the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) on the occasion of the Ten-Year Review and Appraisal of implementation of the BPfA and to commit to stronger action to advance Indigenous Women's human rights at this critical juncture.

We note with disappointment that the process of full recognition of Indigenous Peoples rights has taken a slow process; we urge governments to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous Peoples Rights are Indigenous Women Rights

We affirm that Indigenous Peoples have fought for centuries against genocide, displacement, militarization, colonization and forced assimilation, preserving our cultures, identities, languages and ways of life as distinct Peoples.

We recognize that the colonial and neoliberal policies directed at Indigenous Peoples has left Indigenous Communities among the poorest in the world, alienated from political decision-making processes, disenfranchised by national governments, and subjected to grave and pervasive human rights violations. In addition, the protection and promotion of individual human rights remains key for Indigenous Women, including the right and fundamental freedom to live free from violence.

We maintain that the advancement of Indigenous Women's human rights is inextricably linked to the struggle to protect, respect and fulfill both the rights of our Peoples as a whole and our rights as women within our communities and at the national and international level. We recommend, in keeping with the third report of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous

Issues, that Indigenous Women's issues be mainstreamed throughout the United Nations system.

We note that impoverishment, gender, ethnical and racial discrimination causes an increase in Indigenous Women's risks of becoming ill and being denied medical treatment. We call on governments to meet their obligations to ensure access to high quality, culturally appropriate health services, including full-spectrum, reproductive and sexual health services. We call on governments to undertake a concerted global response to the AIDS pandemic and to pursue strategies for prevention and universal treatment of diseases disproportionately impacting marginalized communities.

We affirm the centrality of individual and collective rights, including sovereignty and self-determination, to the fulfillment of Indigenous Peoples' human rights and the preservation of Indigenous Peoples' natural resources and territories.

We affirm the adoption of a resolution by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights for a second Decade of Indigenous Peoples. In order to ensure that adequate attention is paid to Indigenous Women's human rights, we recommend that in the implementation of the resolution there should be a special focus on Indigenous Women.

Sustainable Development

We affirm that Indigenous Peoples are united by our lands, natural resources, and traditional knowledge which are the foundations of Indigenous Wealth, Strength, Identity, and Culture.

We recognize that, traditionally, Indigenous Women have played an integral role in preserving our cultural heritages, are important producers of food in our communities and the custodians of biodiversity for many of the world's ecosystems. We are practitioners of medicine, pharmacology, botany, nutrition, and the keepers of agricultural technology that sustains the polycultures critical to maintaining biodiversity. Moreover, Indigenous Women are the custodians and have the right to be titleholders to land.

We affirm that, in addition to being the stewards of our lands, environmental, technical, scientific, and custodian of our cultural and spiritual knowledge, Indigenous Women are the primary transmitters of this knowledge to younger generations.

We therefore affirm that Indigenous Women are knowledgeable about the struggle against poverty in our communities and creating strategies for sustainable development in our communities and beyond.

We therefore recommend that Indigenous Women's expertise be reflected in all national and international development strategies and that Indigenous Women, in consultation with their communities and organizations, be part of the formulation and decision-making processes of sustainable development initiatives.

Collective Rights, Indigenous Resources and Economic Justice

We recall that Indigenous Peoples extensive knowledge of the plants and animals on our

lands, has historically been developed, shared and used collectively, and has been systematically robbed most recently via international trade rules like the World Trade Organization's TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights), which fail to recognize collective intellectual property rights and facilitate the piracy of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge by individuals and corporations.

We recognize that a wasteful and short-sighted pursuit of profit at the expense of nature has contributed to global climate change, an issue which literally threatens the Earth, with particular implications for Indigenous Communities. We note that deforestation, desertification, flooding, melting of sea ice, land erosion, pollution, and the toxic contamination of lands and waters are robbing Indigenous Peoples of our way of life, identity and wealth.

The Millennium Development Goals

We recognize the importance of the MDGs as a tool for advancing strategies for sustainable development and women's human rights. We call on all governments to uphold their commitments to realizing these goals, with an emphasis on Indigenous Women's full participation.

We endorse the indicator for Goals 1 and 3 ("the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary school education"). However, we recall that the Western paradigm of schooling has impoverished Indigenous Peoples culturally, spiritually and economically. We therefore hold that the needs of our Peoples be addressed in educational policies for meeting this goal.

We further contend that Goal 3 (gender equality) cannot be met with a singular focus on girls' education. We echo the demands of our sisters throughout the global women's movement for an expansion of Goal 3 to address: reproductive and sexual health and rights, violence against women, women's labor and property rights, and the reduction of women's work burden by guaranteeing access to resources such as technology, sanitation, water, housing, electricity and transportation.

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