**Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association**

**Oral intervention**

**Effective participation, consultation and consent of indigenous women and girls in political and public life**

**Day general discussion on "the rights of indigenous women and girls"- June 21, 2021**

**Submitted to:** The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

**Submitted by:** Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights (which has a special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council).

*Speaker: Menna Bakr*

Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights is grateful to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) for holding this important discussion on the rights of indigenous women and girls.

 Maat is deeply concerned about the grave violations that result from the unequal representation of indigenous women in decision-making processes, whether at the national level or in local government structures in the governments of self-governing territories. Maat stresses that indigenous women have the right to participate in decision-making processes, including political representation, participation in public affairs, and holding executive positions on an equal basis with other women and with their male counterparts. Maat would like to draw the attention of the Committee to some countries where indigenous women were excluded from political representation and participation in public affairs. In Ethiopia, women from five major nationalities in the Benishangul-Gumuz Region were not represented in the Ethiopian government, and their participation in the executive institutions, diplomatic corps and the judiciary is alsmost non-existent. Among the 212 female members in the Ethiopian parliament, not a single woman belongs to the indigenous population of the Benishangul-Gumuz Region, which has always been marginalized by the federal government. Women at the local level in Benishangul-Gumuz also face several obstacles that get into the way of their participation in public affairs and political representation, such as the traditional stereotypical image of women in these societies as only wives and mothers. This view of women is even highlighted by several practices in the Ethiopian society, especially among indigenous populations, to discourage women from participation in political and public life, such as the common saying that goes “Women Belong in the Kitchen and Men Belong at the Office." Such sayings reinforce the inability of women to participate in political and decision-making processes, and perpetuate patterns of discrimination that may take years to change.

The current situation in the region is dramatic, as reported also from our local partner organizations, Kurdish women are not represented in the government, and women in general in Turkey are not represented at the government level except in one ministerial portfolio. Kurdish women in the Turkish parliament were threatned that their immunity will be lifted, before revoking the immunity of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) co-chair, Pervin Buldan. Maat points out that women human rights defenders from the Kurdish minority have faced unprecedented threats due to their protests against the deterioating level of political, economic and social rights of indigenous women in Turkey, including Armenian and Assyrian women who are not represented at the political level or in the executive power structures. The latest of these violations was the unlawful detention of about 26 women human rights defenders from the Kurdish minority.

Maat believes that political quotas in Iraq and in the Kurdistan region had reduced the representation of Yazidi women at various political and administrative levels in Iraq. Moreover, the lack of recognizing Yazidis as one of Iraqi components in the Iraqi National law has exacerbated the fears of Yazidi women who lack any kind of political representation or any space in the Iraqi executive institutions. All this has made Yazidi women vulnerable to a wide range of serious violations that, in nature, contravene international human rights law and the protection guaranteed to women of indigenous communities and those belonging to minorities in international law.

In light of the above, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights calls for the establishment of a mechanism to monitor the indigenous women political representation and effective participation in public affairs, in line with the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples and in a manner that guarantees these women a broader representation that reduces the gap of discrimination and inequality to which they have been subjected in the past decades. Maat also calls on the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to call on different countries to take immediate and effective measures to include indigenous women in decision-making processes.