

General Discussion on Rural Women
7 October 2013
Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

Submitted by the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) is an advisory body to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), with a mandate to discuss indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights.

Today, at the Permanent Forum, indigenous women participate in great numbers, have their own caucus and have a strong voice. Since its first session, the Permanent Forum has paid special attention to indigenous women. The special theme of the third session of the Permanent Forum was indigenous women. During its eleventh sessions, the Permanent Forum has adopted more than 100 recommendations directly referring to the situation of indigenous women.

*Noting that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women makes no reference to indigenous women and that it does not take into account the specific nature of the gender dimension of racial discrimination, the Permanent Forum at its third session (20014) recommended that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: **a.** Pay special attention to the issues related to maintaining the integrity of indigenous women and the gender dimension of racial discrimination against indigenous peoples; **b.** Organize a meeting, in collaboration with indigenous women, UNIFEM, UNESCO and UNDP, with the objective of beginning a process to develop and adopt **a general recommendation on indigenous women, including women living under colonization.** (E/C.19/2004/23, para. 6)*

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues through its Secretariat participated at the Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women of the IANGWE to raise awareness on the special situation of indigenous women.

Through the participation of a Permanent Forum member, the views and perspectives of indigenous women were reflected on the report of the *Expert Group Meeting on Enabling Rural Women's Economic Empowerment: Institutions, Opportunities and Participation*, held in Accra, 20-13 September 2012 (EGM/RW/2011/REPORT).

Following on from this, a major success was the adoption of **Resolution 56/4 Indigenous women: key actors in poverty and hunger eradication** (page 22) of document (E/CN.6/2012/16) at the 56th Commission on the Status of Women. This is a landmark achievement in the recognition of the role of indigenous women and their traditional knowledge in the development process towards poverty eradication.

On the occasion of the 56th session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to be held in Geneva, from 30 September to 18 October 2013, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues submits the following recommendations including for the half-day general discussion on rural women (article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women).

1. Indigenous peoples have the **right to self-determination**, which includes the right to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development (Article 3 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples).
2. Indigenous peoples have a special **relationship with the land and the environment**, encompassing socio-political institutions, individual and collective land rights and sophisticated knowledge systems developed through centuries of practice, based on traditions, worldviews, spirituality, cultures and history. Indigenous women have a central role in this, one that is multi-layered and multi-faceted, due to their status and position as the principal transmitters of knowledge, culture and traditions.
3. Indigenous women often face triple-discrimination – on the basis of their race, gender and economic status. This has different dimensions, and can be both internal i.e. within the community, as well as external. Indigenous women are emerging as a powerful and compelling voice in the indigenous rights movement, promoting conditions to better exercise and enjoy their rights on the basis of equality, in a nuanced manner so as to balance customs and traditions that discriminate against them, while continuing to maintain and transmit indigenous cultures and values. The main demands for indigenous peoples including indigenous women are to exercise the right to self-determination, legal guarantees over their ancestral territories and resources and the right to development with culture and identity.
4. Indigenous women play a key role in the **transmission and preservation of culture** -such as language- as well as of the means of production and forms of organization. Indigenous women are often the main contributors to the continuation and transmission of their peoples' cultures, sustainable agricultural practices and food systems and production, including preservation of bio-diversity through seed banks.
5. Most indigenous **knowledge** is based on generations of experience and field-testing. Indigenous peoples and particularly indigenous women have complex practical understandings of agro-biodiversity, agriculture, fisheries, horticulture, forestry and health. This must be recognized and protected;

6. The importance of **Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC)** refers to indigenous peoples' rights of self-determination and is inextricably linked to peoples' land and territorial rights through their customary and historical traditions and practices. FPIC is both a right and a process that enables indigenous peoples and especially indigenous women to reach consent and adopt decisions that are in accordance to their own traditional systems of resource use and management.
7. Indigenous women face **specific struggles to gain space in national and international institutions and political and economic fora** to ensure their rights, particularly in relation to foreign trade and global markets. A resulting factor of globalization is increased poverty and marginalization of indigenous women, who are eased out of the market system through the activities of major corporations.
8. The **full enjoyment of indigenous peoples** to land, territories and productive resources is based on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted in September 2007 by an overwhelming majority of the UN General Assembly. The UN Declaration enunciates the rights and aspirations of indigenous peoples, including indigenous women.
9. The **involvement, perspectives and traditional knowledge of indigenous women** make an important contribution to sustainable development and the conservation of biodiversity and natural resources, such as land, forests, water, seeds and coastal seas. (CSW resolution 2012)
10. Indigenous women often suffer from **multiple forms of discrimination and poverty**, which increase their vulnerability to all forms of violence. (CSW resolution 2012)

Recommendations to States:

1. Indigenous peoples, in particular indigenous women typically face **extreme disadvantages** across a range of social and economic indicators and the impediments to their full enjoyment of their rights. (CSW resolution 2012). Promote and protect indigenous peoples rights, in particular indigenous women who are targeted for their culture and ethnicity, and subjected to violence and marginalization;
2. Promote indigenous peoples' including indigenous women's rights and their rights to lands, territories and resources;
3. Ensure that in demarcation and registration of indigenous lands, indigenous women as equal partners in land use and management, are specifically recognized;

4. Recognize and strengthen the contributions of indigenous women through their knowledge systems, agricultural products and services; protect these intellectual property rights from bio-piracy and ensure fair benefit-sharing according to the Convention on Biological Diversity. In this regard, the role of indigenous women in the continuation of sustainable agricultural practices and seed preservation is central.
5. Take concrete measures to provide and enhance equal access and enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health for indigenous women, including sexual and reproductive health, and access to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation, and safe cooking and heating. (CSW resolution 2012)
6. Respect, preserve and promote, where appropriate, the traditional knowledge of indigenous women with respect to medicine, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals. (CSW resolution 2012)
7. Take particular measures to promote and strengthen policies and programmes for indigenous women with their full participation and respect for their cultural diversity, so that they have the opportunities and the possibility of choice in the development process needed to eradicate the poverty that affects them. (CSW resolution 2012)
8. Take effective measures to ensure indigenous women, in particular the indigenous girl child has equal access to education, which is based on their cultures and traditions including mother tongue instruction to strengthen indigenous language revitalization.