

INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL PROCESSES

Over half of the world's indigenous peoples are women, living in over 90 countries. For the last 20 years, indigenous women have increasingly participated in international processes to assert the rights of indigenous peoples and in particular of indigenous women. In 1995, during the United Nations 4th Conference on Women in Beijing, indigenous women approved and signed the **Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women** setting the basis of indigenous women's claims as indigenous peoples and as women. The conference was the first time that indigenous women had the chance to collectively highlight their diverse cultures at the international level. Since the Beijing landmark, indigenous women have been advocating and gaining more space within the women's movement and the indigenous peoples' movement.

In 2015, indigenous women were actively engaged in several international fora, advocating and lobbying for their rights worldwide.

The 59th session of CWS

More than 30 indigenous women took part in the 59th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), also known as Beijing+20. Their participation included the organization of side events, elaboration and presentation of political statements, marching, lobbying and participating actively in the Regional Women Caucuses.

Indigenous women have for the past years actively participated in CSW's annual sessions at the UN, and the "Indigenous women: beyond the ten-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action", have advocated for, and achieved the adoption of two resolutions on indigenous women. One which urges the adoption of measures that ensure the full and effective participation of indig-

enous women in all aspects of society;¹ and another, entitled “Indigenous women: key actors in poverty and hunger eradication”,² which urges States and agencies of the United Nations system to adopt measures aimed at promoting the empowerment of indigenous women and the realization of their rights. Both resolutions have helped set an agenda and put a stronger focus on indigenous women’s particular situation. During the 2015 session, FIMI/IIWI—The International Indigenous Women’s Forum—led a delegation of indigenous women from different countries including Argentina, Cameroon, Nepal, Philippines, Sudan, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Kenya, Mexico and Peru. Every day, this delegation convened coordination meetings in the UN lobby to exchange experiences and organize the daily activities and debates. Much effort was also taken to reaffirm the advancements achieved during the past twenty years in terms of political advocacy at the international level, and to demand more actions to be taken in order to ensure the full exercise of indigenous women’s rights.

In an interview by UN WOMEN, Ms. Aminatou Samirato Gambo, from Cameroon, shared her perspective on gender equality: “I think that to achieve gender equality we need to take proactive measures to train and place women in positions of political power while meeting their various needs and sensitizing the entire community about women’s rights and gender equality. To do so, we need to focus on the social transformations required to eradicate poverty and employ the most marginalized and excluded peoples, such as the indigenous and local communities by removing all barriers to women’s empowerment”.³

During CSW 59, indigenous women therefore strongly advocated for the removal of such barriers and the empowerment of indigenous women in general.⁴ They had various meetings with governments and decided to coordinate their advocacy efforts to demand that the empowerment of indigenous women be considered as an emerging theme at CSW 61st Session in 2017 on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. To this end, they prepared a position document that was presented as part of an advocacy roadmap that has been developed throughout the year.

UNPFII

The Fourteenth Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (**UNPFII**) provided another occasion for furthering this roadmap. One

week before the UNPFII Session, 24 indigenous women leaders participated in FIMI's Indigenous Women's Global Leadership School's Program on Human Rights and International Advocacy Skills. During an intensive week, these women engaged in a series of learning activities, from keynote-speaker sessions at the United Nations to seminars given by the Institute for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University. On the day before the opening of the session, over 52 indigenous women gathered to share their concerns and organize advocacy strategies for the following weeks, including side events and preparing statements to be presented at UNPFII. During the UNPFII session indigenous women identified a number of priority themes, such as violence against indigenous women and girls, the participation in the various levels of forging the Sustainable Development Goals and the Post 2015 Development Agenda, the inclusion of relevant indicators and the allocation of resources to indigenous women and their organizations and the same recommendation was made to UNPFII by young indigenous women within the frame of the UNPFII 14th Session's Agenda Item 5, "Dialogue on an optional protocol to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples".

Other events and future challenges

In September 2015 the United Nations adopted a new set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals. These will drive the development actions for the next 15 years. Several mentions are made of indigenous peoples and the inclusion of Mother Earth and other references that are relevant to indigenous peoples represent a step forward compared to the Millennium Development Goals.⁵

In early November, on the occasion of the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Continental Network of Indigenous Women of the Americas, nearly 300 indigenous women, youth and ancestral authorities of various peoples from 22 countries of the Americas gathered in Guatemala to reaffirm their commitment to the struggle for a full life for indigenous women and peoples, and the protection, defense and healing of Mother Earth.

Finally, in December 2015, world governments gathered in Paris, France for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Here too, indigenous women participated in actively through constituencies such as WECAN- Women's Earth & Climate Action Network.

Throughout the world, indigenous women are the stewards of their ancestral lands, forests, rivers and territories, as well as of their traditional knowledge. Unfortunately, the Paris Agreement, while an historic document, does not fully include indigenous peoples and gender equality. COP21 has been a step forward but both women and indigenous peoples have a lot of work to do to ensure the inclusion of a gender equality perspective, and the acknowledgement of the key role played by indigenous peoples in combatting climate change.

The international processes that took place this year show the increased participation of indigenous women, and their improved coordination. Many challenges of course remain and need to be addressed one by one. Our accomplishments step by step, year by year, help us continue our road with more strength and confidence, so that indigenous women's rights will be ensured and fully exercised one day at the local, national, regional and global levels. ○

Notes and references

- 1 Resolution E/2005/27.
- 2 Resolution E/CN.6/2012/L.6.
- 3 <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw/participant-voices#sthash.RFdn3SHK.dpuf>
- 4 A/RES/69/2, 19.
- 5 <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/egms/docs/2015/sd-agenda2030/Elsaworkingpaper.pdf>

FIMI/IWIF (*The International Indigenous Women's Forum*) is a global network of indigenous women leaders and organizations from Asia, Africa, the Arctic, the Pacific and the Americas. FIMI promotes the empowerment of indigenous women, and brings together indigenous women leaders and human rights activists from different parts of the world to coordinate agendas, capacity-build, and to develop leadership roles.