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Statement submitted by Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), and International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

Statement

This written statement is respectfully submitted by the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) and Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) to the Commission on the Status of Women in response to the priority theme, Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes.

This submission outlines the main challenges and opportunities (in relation to the priority theme) facing Indigenous Women and Girls, who make up roughly 2.5% of the global population, and who are among those contributing the least to climate change but suffering the most from the effects of climate change.

Main Challenges

There are numerous challenges for Indigenous Women in relation to climate change. Indigenous Women are more severely affected by the challenges to produce or collect sufficient food, or challenges of water scarcity because of climate change (flooding, drought, unpredictable weather, decrease in food varieties etc.). In accordance with culturally defined gender roles, Indigenous Women are often the ones responsible for collecting firewood, fetching water, tending the fields and feeding the family.

When women must spend more time and walk longer distances to produce or collect food and water, their vulnerability to violence also increases. There are numerous examples of this, for instance in Nepal and Thailand, where Indigenous Women living in buffer zones of national parks face brutal human rights violations when entering the park to collect food, herbs, medicinal plants, or water. Or in Kenya, where the Indigenous Women lost their traditional occupation as pastoralists due to the construction of a windmill farm and had to sustain their families through prostitution. Many traditional occupations of Indigenous women are under threat because of climate change putting the economic independence of Indigenous Women at serious risk. For example, a woman from Taymyr, Russia had to quickly sell all the deerskin she had, because she had no place to keep them in cool, when the spring came early.

Indigenous Women are also seriously affected due to displacement of their communities because to climate change. When their communities are forced to relocate either because of natural disasters or because their traditional livelihood is no longer feasible because of climate change, often the victims of the crisis do not have culturally appropriate support to find solutions to their immediate and long-term needs.

Climate change mitigation actions implemented by governments or the private sector (such as green energy projects or the establishment of national parks or protected areas) severely and negatively affect Indigenous Women if they are not involved in the design and implementation of such efforts. Examples include; Lake Turkana Wind Power project in Kenya, or hydro-power projects in Nepal, Philippines and many other places. Many countries in Asia (Nepal, Bangladesh, India and Vietnam) have failed to integrate the needs and knowledge of Indigenous Women through their participation and consultation in the state disaster reduction and climate change national action plans.

Indigenous Women are role-models

Even though Indigenous Women face all these challenges related to climate change, they must also be seen as role-models for their sustainable practices in resource management of forest, water, and land. Many Indigenous Women have expressed their deep-felt connection to the environment and the wish to protect it. Among many forest-dependent Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Women play a central role in forest conservation and management, they are a repository of Indigenous knowledge on non-timber forest products and herbal medicine and are often the keepers of seeds and thus in charge of preserving domesticated plant

varieties. Their knowledge can be used in building climate resilient communities and adaptation plans for which their inclusion and participation in policies and programmes related to climate change is essential. These invaluable roles and contributions of women for the wellbeing of their families and communities are not properly acknowledged nor recognised by community or government actors. Indeed, despite being important agents of change, Indigenous Women are often excluded from participating in decision-making processes that are linked to climate change issues at all levels.

Recommendations

In light of these challenges and opportunities facing Indigenous Women in relation to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes, we implore the Commission to review the following recommendations, and where possible include them in the final report of the 66th Session.

We recommend member states to:

1. Develop climate response mechanisms addressing issues and the concerns of Indigenous Women
2. Recognize and integrate Indigenous Women's role and knowledge in policies and programmes relating to climate change and disasters.
3. Create safe spaces for Indigenous Women to participate on their own terms in decision-making processes that affect their lives
4. Invest in dialogue and research in order to include the perspectives and recommendations of Indigenous Women in policies and programmes related to climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction.
5. Promote the international standards on the right to food, water and decent work for Indigenous Women in state policies, laws and regulations.
6. Ensure the performance of due diligence to adhere to the obligations of States to protect human rights
7. Ensure that the Ministries responsible for drafting the policies and programmes have access to advise and recommendations from Indigenous Women. For instance by setting up advisory committees consisting of Indigenous Women representatives, elected through their own processes.
8. When Indigenous Peoples are displaced because of climate change or natural disasters, it is important that the Indigenous Women are included in the consultations on where and how the community should be relocated.
9. States should ensure the right to compensation when livelihood is destroyed because of climate change