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Statement submitted by CHIRAPAQ — Centro de Culturas Indígenas del Perú, a non-governmental organization 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

Challenges and opportunities for the empowerment of the rural indigenous women of the Americas

Approximately fifty per cent of indigenous women still live in rural areas where the highest rates of exclusion are concentrated. We represent a heterogeneous group subject to multiple forms of violence that undermine the full enjoyment of our rights enshrined in such international instruments as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention of Belém do Pará, the ILO Convention No. 169, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and General Assembly resolution 69/2, in which States reaffirm their commitment to support our empowerment and full and effective participation.

Despite progress in the field of international regulations, enormous gaps remain in their implementation at the State level. We wish to highlight some challenges in the areas of education, communication and information and communications technologies, in the economic sphere and in relation to sexual and reproductive rights.

Right to education and communication and access to information and communications technologies

Although the region has made progress in educational coverage and the development of intercultural bilingual education policies, major ethnic, economic, geographic and gender gaps remain in access, attendance and timely completion for indigenous girls and adolescent women. In rural areas of Peru, according to data from the National Institute of Statistics and Informatics, 34 per cent of indigenous women over the age of 25 are illiterate and only 27 per cent enter secondary education, with higher dropout and grade repetition rates than their male peers and non-indigenous women.

Those indigenous girls who do have access to education confront a low quality system that is characterized by the lack of a gender-equality focus, cultural sensitivity and relevance to their aspirations and the development of their communities. The shortage of teachers trained in intercultural bilingual education remains alarming and investment is required in the development of educational proposals and content suited to the various sociocultural and economic realities. The right to our own education based on our peoples' cosmovision, an education that strengthens the cultural identity and self-esteem of indigenous girls and adolescent women and that recognizes the contribution of their traditional knowledge, is being violated.

Rural indigenous women tend to have high rates of monolingualism, which also poses a major obstacle to the enjoyment of their social and political rights, as it is the dominant language that opens the door to those rights.

Information and communications technologies offer new opportunities for indigenous women in the fields of education and communication, enhancing linguistic empowerment, cultural affirmation, the awareness of rights and the reporting of rights violations to the global community. However, in Latin America, many rural indigenous territories remain cut off, without telephone, radio, television or internet coverage. There is sparse digital literacy.

Moreover, rural indigenous women are not portrayed in State and private media in a dignified way or as actors of change. In response, we have initiated processes to build our own media through the technologies at our disposal, ranging from community loudspeakers to social media. Unfortunately, in several countries, legislative frameworks do not recognize our right to our own media, which has led to the persecution of both our media and our communicators.

Economic rights

At the sixteenth session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, whose theme was the tenth anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, it was concluded that significant challenges remained in the implementation of collective rights to land, territory and resources, as well as the right to self-determination.

This situation is critical for rural indigenous women, because discussion of economic rights involves a discussion of individual and collective rights, and implies the ability to control, administer and manage our territories and natural resources, based on the cosmovision of each people and on reciprocity, exchange, solidarity and the complementarity of gender and generations.

We cannot speak of economic rights while our designs are being copied; we are being forcibly evicted from our lands by extractive companies and internal armed conflicts; megaprojects are being carried out without our prior, free and informed consent; and we are being criminalized for defending those rights.

Sexual and reproductive rights

In the Americas, there are successful practices in indigenous midwifery, such as at the Inuultsivik Health Centre, in Canada, where 97 per cent of deliveries are normal and only 2 per cent are by caesarean section, compared with the national average of 26 per cent. Similarly, indigenous midwives were recently recognized in the new constitution of Mexico City.

However, in most rural areas in the region, indigenous midwives are criminalized. In Peru, the situation has deteriorated in recent years, despite the existence of a sectoral intercultural health policy, whose themes and content theoretically include the promotion of ancestral medicine and its linkage with conventional medicine, allowing for the involvement of indigenous midwives.

Frequently, women's sexual and reproductive rights are given precedence over the rights of indigenous women, as if they were incompatible. Interculturality is not truly institutionalized in State health services and is relegated to the good intentions of some public officials, hampered by the high turnover of staff in rural areas.

Any discussion of child and adolescent pregnancy must mention the link between the phenomenon and sexual abuse and violence. In rural settings, there are high rates of pregnancy among indigenous girls and adolescents. In Balsapuerto, in the Peruvian Amazon, where the Shawi people are in the majority, the percentage of women who delivered their first live child as adolescents aged 15 to 19 is 67.1 per cent, and 4.4 per cent had their first child aged between 12 and 14.

Similarly, a study conducted by the Ministry of Culture of Peru shows that in an Awajún native community, the main victims of sexual violence are girls under the age of 14, who are often abused by persons in their close family and social circle. Analysis reveals rejection by the community and disassociation from its culture's intrinsic behaviour.

In view of the above, we wish to make the following recommendations to the various agencies of the United Nations system, States and indigenous organizations:

- Promote the implementation of the recommendations of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on indigenous women and girls.
- Create statistics and indicators that will consider the ethnic factor in the monitoring of the status of women and girls in rural settings, and mainstream the intercultural approach.

- Improve access, attendance and graduation of rural indigenous girls and young women at all levels of the education system, and promote teacher training among indigenous women and the inclusion of wise women elders in intercultural bilingual education.
- Design and implement, with the full participation of indigenous women, educational and communicational proposals and content, with a focus on gender equality and sociocultural and linguistic relevance, that will respond to the realities of indigenous girls and women, by asserting their identity, strengthening their self-esteem and recognizing their knowledge, inputs and contributions to the comprehensive development of our peoples and of all humankind.
- Recognize community media in national law and end the persecution of indigenous women communicators.
- Promote the installation of the necessary technology and the training of indigenous rural women in the use of information and communications technologies for the full enjoyment of the right to education, communication and justice, and for linguistic empowerment in the framework of the International Year of Indigenous Languages.
- Promote and support sustainable and profitable economic development opportunities for indigenous adolescent and adult women living in rural settings, based on our resources and ancestral knowledge, ensuring fair access to the local, national and international market and to mechanisms to protect the intellectual property of our traditional knowledge.
- Eliminate the intracommunal barriers that prevent our full participation, on equal terms with men, in the management of land and other resources.
- Assure the safety of midwives and indigenous defenders of territorial rights and immediately end their persecution and political imprisonment.
