



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
29 November 2011

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-sixth session

27 February-9 March 2012

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: “The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges”

Statement submitted by International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 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.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

Statement

A call for justice, recognition and appreciation of indigenous peoples with particular reference to the vision, incisive criticism and contribution of the indigenous woman to society as a whole

“I encourage all Member States to take concrete steps to address the challenges facing indigenous peoples — including marginalization, extreme poverty and loss of lands, territories and resources.” These encouraging words of the Secretary-General in August 2011 echo the strong United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and, hopefully, have led to shifts in the consciousness of the global community. Progress has been made but much remains to be done, especially in terms of our understanding of indigenous women, their creativity, ingenuity, adaptation and efficiency within the family and local community. Also, the understanding of gender issues among all cultures is complex and sensitive.

Almost without exception indigenous voices have remained overshadowed by a mainstream discourse rooted in the accumulation of wealth, rather than the appreciation of the dignity of the human person. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights found approximately 600 Guaraní families in the Bolivian Chaco existing in contemporary forms of slavery. Every day around the world, people living in poverty, especially those who name themselves as indigenous are “pushed to the outskirts of our cities as public spaces and transport facilities are privatized and gentrified” (statement by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, to the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session). When penalization, rather than respect and empowerment, is the norm there is an entrenchment, an exacerbation of and a growth in poverty at all levels. Indigenous people traditionally live on lands rich in natural resources and minerals. There is a growing awareness among them that Governments and corporations must be obliged to obtain the free, prior and informed consent of the people who are custodians of their lands before engaging in any activity that changes their lands, resources or territories.

Despite the accumulated impact of centuries of colonization and its erroneous ideas of “development”, many indigenous cultures have produced some of the world’s best activists, scientists, environmentalists, lawyers, artists, poets, musicians and philosophers. As the global awakening and awareness encouraged a return to the harmonious relationship with nature, the Ecuadorian people, both indigenous and mainstream cultures, produced in 2008 the first constitution in the world to recognize the rights of nature. More than 100 communities in the United States of America have included this recognition in their local ordinances and many other countries are promoting education in and advocacy of the rights of nature. A call came from Cochabamba, Plurinational State of Bolivia, in April 2010 to recognize and protect humanity and Mother Earth from the ravages of so many depredatory activities, such as the extraction of fossil fuels, the many logging concessions and the over-exploitation of fresh water resources.

Despite the geo-engineering of the climate crisis, ocean fertilization to grow plankton, and the various crimes committed against rural communities, we wish to highlight the resourcefulness of the indigenous woman in the Bolivian Altiplano or the Central Andean regions of Ecuador and Peru. Studies show that these women skilfully manage a wide range of obligations, such as running households, educating their children, working in the fields, weaving and performing multiple tasks at the

same time. Further recent studies of the indigenous woman living on the outskirts of major Andean cities highlight the very public domain of the marketplace in the lives of so many migrants. Normally the feminine indigenous world was closed and private, hidden away in whispered Kichwa tones, but there is a continual reversal of roles as the constant organic growth of the open market space with its myriad stalls gives the female seller her strong presence in society.

Temporary respites are experienced from the violent excesses of male violence, friendships are formed, but, above all, the economy of the household is secure for another day. All human life is experienced in the Andean marketplace: a tailor patches worn garments, brightly coloured shawls are knitted as the seller awaits the next customer, shoes are repaired on the spot and the never-ending small live animals peer out from cages and await their fate. Domestic expertise has been transformed into a creative approach to meet the needs of new realities.

Experiences such as those described above make it imperative that Governments recognize and invest in the empowerment of the indigenous woman. Her property rights have to be ensured, and she needs control over natural resources for sustainable food security. The promotion of rural women, farmers' cooperatives and access to marketing the food they produce is one of the major requirements for advancement during the coming years.

There is an increasing danger that the global south will follow the disastrous consumer patterns of the northern countries. Thomas Linzey, a United States-based lawyer working to develop the legal framework to protect nature, explains that the dominant form of environmental protection in industrialized countries is based on the regulatory system, legalizing the discharge of large amounts of toxic substances into the environment, and this is not working. Recognizing the rights of Mother Earth, compensation would not only be measured in terms of an injury to people, but also of damage to the ecosystem.

In places throughout the world like the Amazon region, where hundreds of proposed dams, roads, massive oil and gas drilling, pipelines and biofuel plantations threaten to destroy the hydrological systems, it is increasingly critical that indigenous and all peoples unite in supporting the legal rights of nature.

We recommend that the Member States and the international community:

- Ensure the universal implementation of the commitments made in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted by the General Assembly in 2007. The communal spirit of the indigenous community calls for full compliance with the principles endorsed in the Declaration, which will help greatly to empower indigenous women and their community
- Introduce a peer review mechanism in the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Take into serious consideration the recommendations made in the report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples entitled "Extractive industries operating within or near indigenous territories"

- Raise awareness of, design and implement cooperative enterprises tailored to the capacity of the indigenous peoples during the International Year of Cooperatives 2012
 - Implement a nationally tailored “social protection floor initiative”, a tool necessary to eradicate poverty and empower indigenous peoples.
-