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entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Indigenous Peoples’ International Centre for Policy Research and Education, 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

We fifty-six women from forty-one indigenous peoples communities across Asia gathered in the fourth conference of the Asia Indigenous Women's Network, acknowledge the progress in the recognition of women's equal rights and indigenous peoples' rights and the succeeding initiatives of transformative partnership with indigenous peoples. However, twenty-three years since Beijing, and 13 years since the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, we indigenous women and our communities are still struggling against the increasing loss of the most vital element of our security and well-being – our ancestral lands and resources. Complex challenges persist as economic interests and political power prevails over saving the planet for the future generation.

There is an alarming increase in criminalization and extrajudicial killings of indigenous peoples human rights defenders protecting indigenous territories and resources from further extraction and exploitation. Global Witness, in 2017, reports that Asia is the second most dangerous region for human and indigenous rights activists and states that while there is a one female to 9 males murdered, indigenous women suffer from gender-specific threats i.e. sexual violence, trumped-up charges, smear campaigns and threats on their children among others.

Criminalization extends to our indigenous livelihoods and food systems, not to mention that most are already in states of plunder from extractive industries and degradation from toxic industrial waste and extreme climate conditions. More than hunger and poverty, our over-all well-being is threatened from all angles, even within the confines of the territories that has once secured our ancestors. All these are galvanizing the challenges we, indigenous women, face in the fulfilment of our roles and contributions to sustainable development.

Militarization of indigenous communities in the Philippines and Bangladesh continue, resulting to disruption of daily activities, children's education and the weakening of indigenous socio-political, economic systems impacting heavily on our collective dynamics as indigenous peoples. Displacement in favor of state priorities and corporate agenda in the name of development or governance exacerbates our poverty.

The Philippines' anti-insurgency campaign has resulted to thousands of indigenous peoples repeatedly evicted since 2015 and 55 indigenous schools permanently closed. Leaving the security of homes and economic resources to survive on donations in temporary shelters is dehumanizing, not to mention the impacts of deprivation and insecurity. Unresolved land disputes, coupled with the state-supported migration into indigenous territories in Bangladesh continues to fuel attacks against indigenous women. In 2017 alone, 56 young indigenous women have reportedly been either sexually or physically assaulted or both mostly by non-indigenous settlers. Ten incidences of violence against women were recorded as of January to October this year (Kapeeng Foundation, 2018 and 2019).

The same phenomenon has numerically minoritized the indigenous peoples in their own territory impacting on their access to basic services, programs and indigenous self-governance, including access to temporary special measures to leverage women's participation and representation in Tripura, India. In this situation, indigenous women are forced to seek better opportunities outside their communities, most often, leaving children in the care of parents or relatives. The suppressive Armed Forces Special Powers Act, moreover, is still in effect in Northeast India.

Violence against indigenous women characterize campaigns to stifle the advancement of our assertion of our individual and collective rights to self-

determination. Patriarchy in the domestic and public spheres coupled with poverty spurs attacks to indigenous women within the family and community. In India, 2,290 alleged witches were killed from 2000–2016, most of which were poor, illiterate, old, widow and single. Aside from superstition, witch crimes have also been linked to disputes over land and property of women.

The region remains to be a popular labor, sex and organ trafficking hub with “India as the most dangerous place for women on issues of sexual violence and harassment, cultural and traditional practices and from human trafficking including forced labour, sex slavery and domestic servitude” according to the 2018 Reuters survey. More than three quarters of tribal women from three states are in major cities working as domestic helpers.

In one indigenous community in Nepal, there is, reportedly, at least one member in every household who exchanged a kidney for much needed cash. Poverty, lack of assets and unequal power relations continue to drive the Tharu practice of bonded labor despite Nepal’s legal prohibition. Women and girls, as young as five years old, are usually peoned to pay off debts.

The justice system is usually geographically and financially inaccessible, alienating in language, format and process, culturally and gender insensitive. Aside from these, corruption in law enforcement prevails tolerating tampering of medico-legal reports. Indigenous women victims and survivors of human rights violations and gender violence are left to no recourse but to accept out-of-court settlements.

Due to geographical, information, language barriers including gender discrimination, many indigenous women in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia remain undocumented and do not enjoy their right to a nationality. This deprives them access to social protection and basic services.

The impacts of the climate crises escalates human pressure and competition for resources predisposing indigenous women and children to disproportionate risks. The montane erosion caused by Typhoon Mangkhut in the Philippines, destroying women’s investments on their homes and livelihoods is clearly related to the local history of corporate mining in the area. Indonesia has had its series of incidents from volcanic eruptions and earthquakes to the latest tsunami in Central Sulawesi. In both sudden and slow-onset disasters, emergency responses detracts and obscures the equally affected but isolated indigenous communities, the underlying matters of human rights and accountability including the particular strategic needs of indigenous women, girls and those with disabilities.

These current regressions in the recognition, protection and fulfilment of individual and collective rights of indigenous women is counterproductive to the global targets of sustainable development and gender empowerment. It induces intercommunity/intra-people conflict, food instability, landlessness and general human insecurity. It keeps indigenous women impoverished, dependent and in vulnerable conditions, and unable to fully enjoy all their rights as women and indigenous peoples. In the spirit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and “leaving no one behind”, structural injustice must be addressed by all actors at all levels!

We, indigenous women commit to harness and unleash our power and potentials to realize our visions of resilience and sustainable development. Our diverse voices and capacities, experiences and knowledge, however, have to be acknowledged and meaningfully respected in governance towards inclusive development. To these end we recommend for states, multilateral agencies, stakeholders and development actors to:

1. Address structural barriers to indigenous women's empowerment to advance their roles and contributions to sustainable development by effectively implementing state commitments to indigenous peoples and women. This should include:

- Suspension of all initiatives and programs without genuine consent from indigenous women and peoples concerned or otherwise resulting to plunder of their territories and exploitation of human resources including gender based violence and trafficking among indigenous women and youth;
- Repeal existing policies contrary to the UNDRIP and the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and effectively integrate the recognition and protection of women's rights and indigenous peoples' rights in the implementation of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, at all levels, in consultation and partnership with indigenous peoples noting the need to leverage spaces to effectively engage indigenous women. The need for disaggregated data based on sex and ethnicity is crucial to this end.

2. Institutionalize special measures to address the intersectionalities of discrimination specially land and resource rights of indigenous women within the scope and protection of indigenous peoples' collective rights to land. Sufficient resources should be allocated to operationalize these.

3. Support initiatives to respond to the need for development strategies that respects collective rights, ensures environmental, social, cultural and the spiritual integrity of indigenous women and their communities while affirming their capacities to decide and implement the kind of development they want.

4. Recognize indigenous women's significant roles in the conservation and sustainable use of resources and traditional livelihoods as green jobs.

5. Access to financial and technical support should be empowering, not dehumanizing. Development actors should facilitate direct linkages of indigenous women to financial and technical support agencies.

6. Allocate resources to leverage the position of indigenous women to enable effective participation.
